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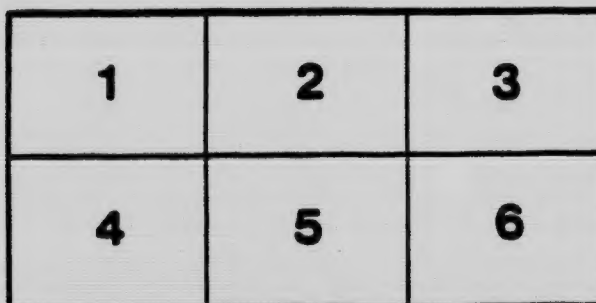
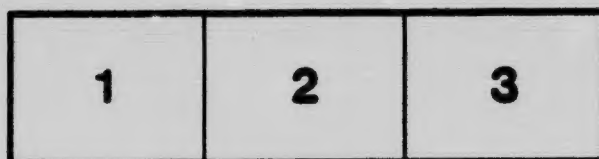
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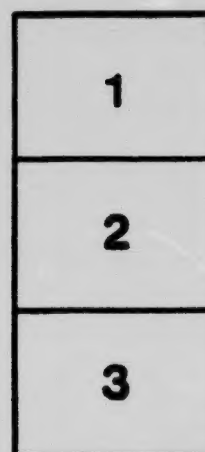
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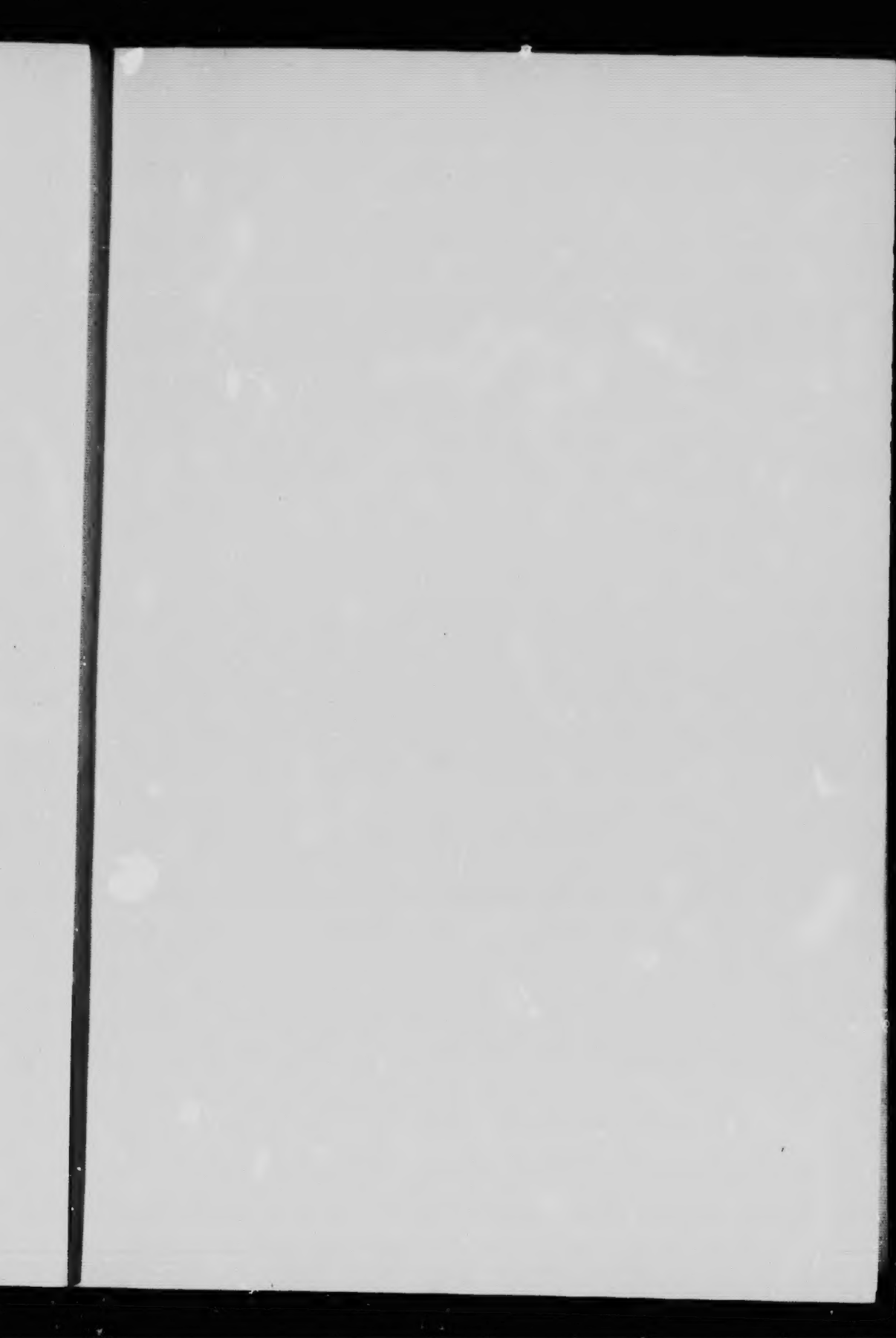
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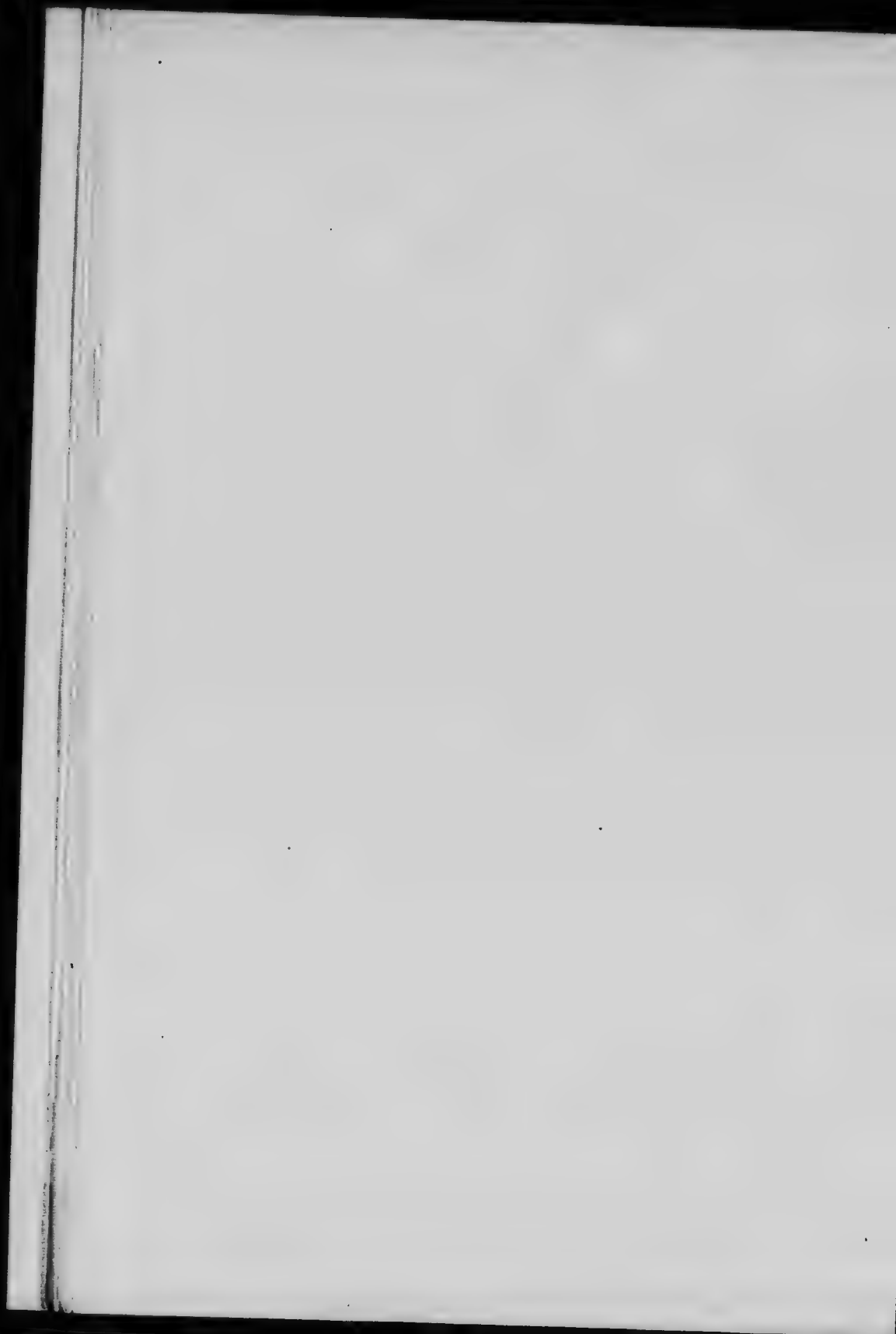
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TO MY FRIEND
JANE BREWSTER HYDE



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THE CONGRESSWOMAN



The Congresswoman

CHAPTER I

FACING AN ARID FUTURE

CYNTHIA PIKE sat beside a window watching a funeral move along the red dirt road which led to town. She knotted her handkerchief into a ball, dabbed her eyes with it, smoothed out the damp rag, sighed, and looked about uneasily. The house seemed curiously still. She had grown so accustomed to the treadmill duties of a nurse that when a pause came, and afterwards a funeral, the sudden inactivity and peace felt like the quieting of an opiate. Through the dull maze of her feelings throbbed a sense of disquiet at the thought of grief being swallowed up by mere thankfulness.

As the string of carriages disappeared round a distant corner of the road, she realized that meaner husbands had existed than Bunyan Pike and she wondered why she did not feel the poignant grief and desolation ascribed to widowhood.

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The bedroom door opened quietly and a woman's face peered in. It was a rugged, uncomely face. A strong nose and a square chin were the most prominent features in its architecture. Suddenly a smile transformed the rough-hewn features, revealing quiet humor in the singularly gray eyes and tenderness in the large, inexorable mouth.

"Are ye feelin' better?"

"Yes, thank you, Teenie."

Cynthia smiled at the tall, gaunt Scotch-woman.

"Why don't ye change your name, Teenie?" she asked irrelevantly.

"'Cause I am no' so sure that I would be changin' it for the better. Still," she added with grave deliberation, "John Bender is very much in earnest an'—"

"Mercy, I was thinking of your first name," explained her mistress hurriedly. "Teenie seems ridiculous for your six feet, one. The last thing I want to hear of is you getting married."

"A name's a puir thing tae lay up against a body. My grandmither used tae say, 'Teenie, woman, gang cannie an' see ye dinna drive your pigs doon a muddy lane.' There's few married women in the warl, anyway, that I envy."

Cynthia Pike turned away with a repentant feeling.

"I'm glad tae see ye chirk up a bit. Ye've had a sair life of it."

The woman beside the window dabbed again at her eyes with the smudged handkerchief.

"It's no my tongue that will ever speak ill o' the dead."

Teenie began cautiously as if venturing her way against raw, human feelings.

"I've worked for ye two years come August an' I couldna help but see what a ticht hand the maister kept on the lines, sick though he was. Men are like that—as a rule. It's the reason I've stayed plain Teenie Watt. There's a maisterful streak in mysel'. If there were two of us pullin' at the reins, life would hae been a sair tug of war. Only—the noo—that he's gone ye ought tae begin tae tak' notice."

"For Heaven's sake, Teenie, don't go about talking like that. I was very happy with Mr. Pike."

A grim smile wrinkled the Scotchwoman's features.

"Mr. Pike was a vast improvement on the average husband," the widow confessed with a half-choked sob. "I would not have changed him for—well, for Latimer Stone, for instance."

"Mistress Stone would have conseederable deeficulty tradin' off Latimer. He's no what might be called a marketable commodity."

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Teenie paused to brush a ghostly cobweb from the ceiling.

"If Latimer Stone wa'r put up at auction in a hall full of auld maids, I hae my doubts of her gettin' a thirty cent bid on him. Jist the same, grief or nae grief—ye canna deny but your gudeman was what might be called mais-terfu'."

The widow did not turn her eyes away from the blazing sunshine.

"So, I'd advise ye—this is atween ye an' me an' the gate post—tae chirk up. If ye are the mither of a grown-up lad, ye've held yer ain wonderful. Ye're no a bad-luikin' woman for thirty-six an' there's as guid fush in the sea as ever come out of it."

"Teenie, how can you even think of such a thing, with Mr. Pike's funeral scarcely out of sight!"

"I'm no thinkin', I'm sayin' it. It's a way I've got. Have ye an idea yet o' how he's left ye?"

"No, that's been on my mind all the morn-
ing. I can't talk to anyone but you, Teenie. I feel so safe with you. You don't go round telling people's affairs."

Cynthia Pike looked up at the woman with a piteous appeal.

"I'm makin' no brag about that," answered Teenie with calm severity. "It's no great job for me tae keep things tae mysel'."

"I don't know how we're left." There was a look of fright in the widow's face. "Bunyan never told me a word about his affairs. He said I had no business head. I know we have very little in the bank—only a few hundred dollars. There's this house, of course." She stared about her with a glance of utter antipathy. "Oh, how I hate it, Teenie, out here in the red dirt! Bunyan always declared that Mullein would come our way. That was why he built here. He got the land cheap and felt sure that some day it would sell for thousands of dollars. When they bored that deep artesian well west of the town, Mullein moved in the other direction. They will never build here—now, they're getting farther and farther away from us all the time. We couldn't get six hundred dollars for this place. Nobody wants it."

The servant's face grew tender with sympathy.

"I don't dare to think of the future, Teenie." The woman's voice trailed off into a sob. "I'm nearly forty. I never earned a cent in my life. There's nothing I can do but cook or scrub or wash and iron,—I don't know whether I can even keep you longer."

The silence was broken only by the wail of the sand-laden wind and the querulous chirp of a sparrow, which hopped about on the porch.

"I depend on you so, Teenie. We hadn't

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time to do much talking when—he was ill. I can't speak to Deb about—his father. You saw—my life wasn't very happy or even—easy. The queer thing is—even if I am thirty-six, I don't feel old." She laughed nervously. "I suppose I ought to. What I hate to think of is dying in this country. Hating it for half a lifetime as I have done. I want to go out in the world and see—see something—different from this."

Teenie laid her fingers on the woman's hair with a swift, sudden caress.

"Come, let me mak' ye comfortable. It was awful luck to sprain yer ankle the mornin' o' yer husband's funeral. It's an occasion that does no' come tae a woman twice in a lifetime."

"No," her mistress laughed nervously. "That's true."

She rose, leaning upon the servant's arm, and hobbled slowly across the room. Teenie seated her on a couch beside the opposite window, lifted the bandaged foot to a hassock and dropped a pillow behind her head.

"Now—are ye comfortable?"

"Yes, quite comfortable. When do you suppose they'll be home from the funeral?"

"About five. I've got enough tae do before that time. Deb invited the Lockes back tae dinner. That's jist like him—the dunder-head."

Mrs. Pike lifted her head haughtily.

"I don't know why you should say things like that, Teenie. Debonair is the smartest, handsomest boy in Mullein."

"Ye've a perfect right tae an opinion of yer ain bairn,—I suppose every mither has."

The servant lifted her broom, picked a handful of fluff from the straws and resumed her sweeping.

"Teenie," called her mistress fretfully, "pull down this curtain, won't you. The sun is putting my eyes out."

The woman obeyed in silence. She went out closing the door behind her, and Cynthia sighed impatiently. She felt in a mood for confidences but Teenie seemed to have grown suddenly unsympathetic. During the last few days life had begun to put on a different aspect. For years the horizon had been bounded by a sickroom and the deadly, dull-hued companionship of a man, whom she had recoiled from very quickly after marriage. She wondered vaguely how long a widow ought to wear crape and go about the world with a dejected mien. The future looked stupid and full of endless solitude. If she must mourn she must also work, work at something, anything. She writhed in sudden impatience as she sat with her hands folded.

"Teenie!"

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The door opened and the woman waited for her to speak.

"Aren't there stockings to be darned?"

"What if there are?"

"I want them."

"What—the day? I'll bring ye some crochetin'. That's proper-like work, wi' yer man just deid. Somebody mient come in."

"I don't care if they do. I can't sit here with my hands as well as my feet still. Bring me the stocking bag."

"Aye."

Teenie went slowly upstairs and returned with a red calico bag.

"There are no many here. Oh, there's some oot on the line."

She came back in a minute to stand in the doorway slowly pairing a handful of stockings.

"Here's Deb's elegant silk socks. Ye canna put them through one wash withoot holes comin' in them. Silk's feckless stuff for a man tae wear. The socks his Aunt Phœbe sent him for Christmas are, well, they're sensible." She pulled a clumsy white-footed thing over her hand. "He's never had them on but once."

"I don't know why my son should wear horrors like these. They are fit for nothing. Give them to old Tom."

"All right," replied Teenie stolidly, then went back to her work.

Cynthia Pike threaded a needle with purple

silk and slipped her hand into a delicate sock which clung about her fingers like a soft caress. She began to darn a large hole with slow, exquisite stitches. Suddenly she bent forward and lifted the window shades. The sunshine flooded the little room, gleaming on the varnished furniture and searching out gaudy spots on the flowered carpet.

Her hands dropped into her lap. For two days she had been trying to keep her mind set upon one thing,—that she was a widow with new responsibilities facing her and that she ought to be weighted down by grief and the sad-eyed desolation she had seen in women, who went about with their faces hidden behind black veils.

When she raised her head she caught sight of her reflection in an opposite mirror. There was not a trace of grief or wistfulness in the eyes which stared back at her; instead she met a sparkle of youthful expectancy. Her face looked brighter and—she confessed it to her own conscience—more comely. She realized that Teenie was right. Although not yet forty, she might still be called a handsome woman.

During the sagging years which lay behind her, she had almost lost interest in her appearance. For days at the time she had gone about too weary and disheartened to glance into a mirror. She dropped her face into the palm of one hand, leaned her elbow upon her knee,

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and began to take inventory of herself. The brilliant coloring of youth had vanished but her skin was singularly fair and unlined. Although the coppery sheen had gone from her hair, it swept off her forehead in soft waves as it had done during her short, triumphant girlhood when she had been called the belle of Wichita. While she sat studying her reflection with the critical air of an appraiser her cheeks went suddenly crimson. She had forgotten that she was only two days a widow.

She remembered Teenie's ridiculous phrase about sitting up and taking notice. She turned away to stare listlessly at a sun-drenched world. Across the road stretched a wide field. A few budding trees stood before the house; slender wands which would not throw a shadow for many years. The wind drove a shivering ripple through the grassy blades of a cornfield. Beyond, straight out to the gray of the horizon, stretched the prairie, with nothing breaking its monotony except patches of different-hued green. Between her and the intense blue of the sky a few cheap houses like her own stood beside the solitude of a red dirt road. An avenue of cottonwood trees marked the sluggish flood of the Canadian river. Her thoughts flew to the world beyond the horizon, to the immense, pleasure-dowered, throbbing world, which she knew through books and magazines.

During early girlhood, she had married and come with Bunyan Pike from the old Wichita home to a new country. He had taken her to Galveston for a honeymoon. So long as she lived she could never forget one disillusionment which was a memory of that trip.

Since childhood, she had longed to see the ocean. Her mother's girlhood home had been on the coast of Maine and even her lullabies held a certain music of the sea. She had dreamed of green waves dashing against rocks as vast as the walls of a cathedral and waited breathlessly for the first glimpse of a blue ocean stretching to meet a bluer sky. The picture of it seemed like a fixed thing, a scene she had known all her life and loved with an intensity so deep that it had been unspoken.

That afternoon at Galveston she sat beside her husband on a bench under a vast, ugly pavilion, watching the dull, muddy sea creep like slow wrinkles over a hot, flat beach. She wanted to shriek as if in mere resentment. Hers was nothing but the dull, commonplace silence of a throng of vacationers, who longed for a breath of coolness and for the sun to go down. The sparkle had suddenly gone out of her life that day and with arid quiet she met one disillusionment of life after another. They came fast.

She sat with her eyes fixed on the red dirt country. There must be something more in-

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teresting beyond the monotonous horizon. She longed to be in the heart of it, breathing, living, doing things which were worth while. The yearning made her heart throb quickly.

She glanced at a clock on the shelf. Beside it stood a picture of Bunyan Pike. A physiognomist would have studied the man's face with interest, searching in vain for a trace of anything tender or even human. The long, sharp nose, the straight, thin-lipped, inflexible mouth, the colorless eyes and the stubborn chin was not so uncomely as they were repellant. He was slender almost to attenuation. He looked like a man through whom the blood coursed with so stagnant a flow that it scarcely warmed his body. Although the red dirt had closed over his coffin, the eyes in the picture seemed to be alive. They watched the woman on the sofa with a searching gaze. A shiver ran through Cynthia's body. She rose and hobbled across the room, steadying herself against a bed and table she passed. She lifted the photograph, opened a drawer, and thrust it face down beneath a heap of clothing. While she stood upon one foot, she heard voices, and the front door opened.

A boy entered, a tall slip of a lad with fair hair and a handsome, ardent face.

"Mother!" he cried. "Why don't you keep still? The doctor said if you limped

around you might not walk for weeks. Why didn't Teenie look after you?"

"Teenie did look after me. It wasn't her fault. I simply can't keep still, Deb. I want to be—oh, there's so much I want to do."

CHAPTER II

THE LONE SQUAW STRIP

THE sunshine, that unending glare which in Oklahoma they call sunshine, poured into the parlor of the Pike bungalow.

James Forrest, the only human being to whom Bunyan Pike had entrusted a knowledge of his affairs, sat beside a table reading the dead man's will. He droned out the last sonorous sentence, then looked over the top of his spectacles at the little circle beside him. Nobody spoke or moved until Debonair leaned forward and tied the lace of a russet shoe.

With his head bent, the lad turned a glance of eager inquiry upon his mother. Her hands were lying idle in her lap, her lips were parted, and a brilliant flush surged across her face.

"Is that all?" she whispered.

"That is all," answered Forrest.

When he folded the document the stiff paper crackled between his fingers. He took off his glasses and polished them with a silk handkerchief.

"That is all," he repeated. "There are no codicils, no legacies, no mention of anyone except yourself. The will was dated two years

ago when a Kansas City doctor told Bunyan he might hang on for some time. Your husband took the verdict coolly. He came straight to see me and made his will. He never talked about it again. I only saw him once after that. Then, you remember, he was not quite himself."

"Yes, I remember." The woman moistened her lips with her tongue. "I remember it all quite clearly."

"Do you understand it?"

"I don't know that I do. It sounds as if he had left us," she looked up helplessly, "such a great deal of land, and—and—not so much money."

"There is a great deal of land." Forrest spoke slowly and incisively. "When Bunyan Pike bought it for a few dollars an acre it looked like a perfectly fool deal. The man who sold it to him cleared out and went to Texas as if scared he might have to give the money back. Pike always seemed to me a level-headed chap. Why he wanted those miles of dry, dead land up in the Indian territory, clear away from irrigation and out of reach of railroads, beat me. It's nothing but a dog-goned, dismal, dry, red-dirt desert."

"Oh, my God!" cried Cynthia with a sob. "What are we going to do?"

Forrest's mouth wrinkled into a peculiar smile.

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"Did you notice where I said your claim was located?"

"No," answered the woman monotonously. "I don't know where it's located and I don't care. You've told me what it's like and it sounds worse than Mullein."

"It's in the very heart of the Lone Squaw Strip. You have ten miles there with a clear claim to it."

Debonair sprang to his feet.

"Why, Mother!" he cried breathlessly.

"What?" she asked dully.

"Haven't you read in the papers how they found oil on the Lone Squaw Strip? It's squirting out of the ground like geysers. Why, Mother, it's as good's a gold mine!"

"No!" the woman spoke in a low, incredulous tone.

"The boy's right. It is a gold mine." Forrest's voice was impressively slow. "The news came out a few days ago. Nobody knew who it belonged to—your part of it I mean. Bunyan always kept mum about his affairs. I didn't say a word, it wasn't the time to."

"And—" cried Cynthia abruptly,—"here I've been toiling all these years! I've gone without things I wanted! I've stayed in this deadly hole with all that money and—"

"It wasn't money then," interrupted Forrest. "It was land you owned—a desert."

"Yes, but the oil was there all the time," insisted the woman.

"What good would that have done you? Nobody knew it was there."

She went on as if she did not hear him.

"It looks as if there had been some injustice done me. I've wasted the best years of my life hating Mullein and everybody in it, until it's come to be almost a disease with me. Then those years with Bunyan lying ill and me nursing him day and night, doing all the drudgery till Teenie came—doing the washing, even."

She stretched out her hands and looked at them as if seeking for evidence that she had toiled.

"You don't understand," Forrest continued stolidly. "Owning that land didn't mean money till a few weeks ago. You were nothing but land paupers, desert paupers. You couldn't have sold that Lone Squaw Strip six months ago for what Bunyan paid for it. It's a damned good thing you couldn't. It's about all he did leave. Today it would bring—"

"What?" she cried impatiently.

"Nobody can tell. If the Lone Squaw pans out as big as the Poinsetta did, it may be worth twelve or fifteen million dollars."

"Twelve—or—fifteen—million!"

The woman rose to her feet and stared at the

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lawyer, her eyes fixed upon his face with amazed bewilderment.

"What?" asked Debonair.

"You take the breath out of my body," continued Cynthia. "Twelve or fifteen million? If you had said twelve or fifteen thousand it would have looked like wealth to me."

"Twelve or fifteen million!" repeated Debonair. His face glowed with eagerness. "Gee! that means going some!"

Forrest put on his spectacles and looked at the two people before him.

"I can remember the time," he mused, as if speaking to himself, "when Bunyan Pike worked like eight yoke of oxen, and now—"

"I helped a bit," interrupted the widow.

"No doubt of that, no doubt,"—the man's tone was emphatic—"only a lawyer sees this sort of thing all the time, this 'going some,' as the lad calls it, when the man, who earned the money, has been laid away."

"I'm very thankful it came, for my boy's sake," said the mother impulsively. She laid a hand upon Debonair's arm.

Her son threw back his head and laughed.

"I know the first move we'll make, Mother. Let's get out of this blamed country of red dirt and chiggers. I've hated it all my life."

"So have I," she agreed in a whisper.

"You're forgetting the Lone Squaw Strip is *all* red dirt," suggested the lawyer.

"No, I'm not," answered Cynthia quickly. "This is a good enough country to take money out of, but I can find a better place to spend it in."

"You women are all the same." There was a sneer in the man's voice. "Money means nothing to you but spending it. Perhaps I set too high a figure on what's coming to you. One can't always make a dead sure guess on an oil well. It may not pan out more than seven million."

"Seven million's still some money," commented Debonair. He struck a match on his shoe and lit a cigarette.

Forrest rose and lifted his hat from the table.

"Do you want me to look after your business as I did for Bunyan?"

"Why, yes, I reckon so." Cynthia Pike turned to her son with an irresolute glance. "You'll have some work to do. I'm no business woman. You say there are no strings to Bunyan's will?"

"None, he left you wholly unfettered."

"That was pretty good of him."

The woman brushed a handkerchief across her eyes, then held out her hand to the lawyer.

He nodded to Debonair but stopped as he passed Teenie, who sat in grave silence beside the door. He looked down with a keen, searching gaze into her eyes.

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"You're a level-headed woman,"—his voice dropped to a whisper,—"you may have to keep an eye on this family of yours."

"Aye," she answered, in a low voice, "there's other things on two wheels, besides a cart, that needs a brake—once in a while."

CHAPTER III

UNDER A NEW PLANET

"**D**EBBY dear, please don't talk about going North," begged Mrs. Pike. "Stay with me for the winter at least."

"Not on your plush-framed crayon portrait," answered the boy. "For Heaven's sake, Mother, quit calling me Debby. Debonair's the human limit, but—Debby!"

"I simply can't remember, you've been Debby to me for so long."

"When we get out of these diggin's I'm going to lay down the law to each one of you. You've got to remember I am D. Martin Pike. That's the only name I've run off since we left Mullein. D. Martin isn't half bad. Somebody spelt it De Martin the other day. That looked so nifty I'm going to use it. Then, I'm not Deb or Debby or even Debonair to that old Scotch persimmon. I am Mr. Pike, MISTER Pike, you tell her so, from me. Why don't you fire her any way? You can afford something classy now, a French maid or English or—"

"Deb, we couldn't get along without Teenie."

"Deb!"

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His mother sighed.

"Son, it's perfectly ridiculous. I can never remember De Martin; besides what does it matter between you and me?"

"It matters just this. If you plug ahead calling me De Martin when we're alone, you'll get into the habit. Debby's enough to drive a man to drink."

"I can't think of you as a man, son." The mother's eyes grew misty with tears while she laughed. "Why it don't seem any time since I stood over an ironing-board doing up your cotton knickers and ruffy blouses. You did make such washings, Deb," she smiled tremulously. "I've seen ten of your little suits in the tub in one week."

Debonair jumped to his feet.

Mother, you make me so tired my joints squeak. Forget the ironing-board and the wash-tub. We're rich now as pink mud. There's hardly anything we can't have that we want. We'll never get anywhere loaded up with wash-tubs and ironing-boards."

"Nearly every woman in Oklahoma did her own washing at some time in her life."

"You needn't go around sky-hooting about it if you did." The boy stamped his foot impatiently. "You never lose a chance to give away that grandfather was an old sett."

"The 'old setts' were pretty good people, I tell you, Debby." His mother's voice grew de-

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fiant. "If it hadn't been for 'old setts' this country would have been nothing today but a wild reserve."

"I hate the whole blooming outfit. I want to get away from it."

"We can't, Sonnie, Forrest won't let us go."

"Let us! I'd like to see him hinder us. He can't keep you here if you don't want to stay."

"I simply can't go."

"Why?"

"Well, nobody knows how things will go with the Old Squaw. Unless some legislation is put through, the oil under our claim might as well be water. I can't understand it myself exactly, although Forrest talked about it for an hour yesterday. We lose a fearful lot of money in shipping the oil to Coffeyville. The rates are going up all the time; these railroads stand together, so Forrest says, and make us deliver to the last cent. If we could fight the Central Oil and lay our own pipe lines, or send our oil through their pipes, but—"

She paused with her eyes bent appealingly upon the boy.

"Well, why don't you?"

"Debby, it means legislation and having bills thrown into a waste basket or killed, or something, and eternally flinging good money after bad. Forrest wants to send a man to Washington to lobby for us."

"Well, send one!"

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"You haven't the faintest idea of what it costs, Sonnie. I don't remember, I never could carry figures in my head. But when Forrest told me—why—"

"Mother," cried the boy impetuously, "fire old Forrest. There's any number of clever young chaps waiting to carry a business like yours. Forrest's a bat-eyed old weenie-wurst."

"Deb!"

"Let's get down to business. If you won't go to New York or Atlantic City or somewhere and live in the style we ought—with as much money as we have,—why, I'll go to college!"

"To Olanthe, Deb!" asked the mother eagerly.

"No, not to Olanthe nor any other yap institution! I'll let you choose from any one of these,—Yale, Harvard or Princeton."

"Sonnie, couldn't you be contented nearer home?"

"No." Debonair puffed a few light rings of smoke from his cigarette. "I've got my heart set on one thing. I want to be among gentlemen. I have the ambition to be a gentleman myself some day."

"Can't you learn in the Southwest—to be a gentleman?" His mother spoke hesitatingly.

"No."

Cynthia Pike stared into vacancy for a few minutes. The silence grew long and over-

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powering. Her memory had flown back to the days when Debby was a rosy, round-faced baby with an adorable mouth and hair like a duckling's down. She remembered how she had dampened each tiny curl and wound it about her finger, till it felt like a skein of silk. A sob rose in her throat and seemed to choke her.

When the baby came she had begun to recoil from her husband's cold tyranny and the dead level of his companionship. She could feel again the thrill that went through her body as the soft little face snuggled into her breast. It suddenly changed life and made the future look rosy. She had dreamed such dreams that day, the day when she listened breathlessly to each soft pulsation of the baby heart against her own.

"Mother,"—the boy stretched himself in the big leather chair. "I don't know whether I ever asked you before, I reckon I never did, but where did you find such a crazy name for me as Debonair?"

"Dear, does it seem crazy? Your father was set on giving you his uncle's name, Pete, Pete Martin. I had always hated Pike. I hate it now. You were such a sweet pink and white little mite that Pete—Pete Pike—why I couldn't endure the thought of it for a second."

Debonair laughed lightly.

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"You're right, Pete Pike would have put me out of business."

"I was ill," explained his mother eagerly, "for months after you came. It was frightfully hot that summer. I fretted and fretted about calling you Pete. It brought on a fever. At last your father let me choose your name. I used to lie searching the dictionary for something that sounded nice, something that did not go awfully with Pike. One day I found Debonair. I loved to say it to myself—Debonair Pike, Debonair Martin Pike,—it was really a pleasant sort of name. Besides, Debby, it meant good lineage and just what I felt sure you would grow up to be—gentle and courteous and sparkling and full of spirit."

The boy tossed his cigarette out of the window and jumped to his feet. His mother laid her hand upon his arm.

"I'll try to get into the habit of the De Martin, Sonnie." She spoke cheerfully. "I'll grow used to it in time."

"I don't mind, Mother," the lad turned suddenly and kissed her. "Debonair isn't half bad. It's certainly exclusive and it's pruney compared to Pete Pike. But drop Deb and Debby, Mother."

"All right." Cynthia Pike laughed. "Now, let's talk college."

"Not now, Mother. I promised to meet Bernard at three. Good-by."

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She stood watching her son walk down the street beside an older man, who lumbered heavily along beside the slight, graceful lad. Once Debonair threw back his head with a fascinating little gesture he had, then she heard him laugh. There was not a worldly care in that laugh. She turned away and walked restlessly about the library. She understood every symptom of the boy's discontent. She was fighting it herself. The awful unrest rent her many times during the twenty-four hours. If there had been bread to knead or floors to scrub or a washing to do, or anything which was absolutely her duty and could not be side-stepped, it might have been possible to work it out of her system, only now—it was different.

Months ago she had sold the lonely little bungalow on the red dirt road near Mullein, and moved into Oklahoma City, rented a house in a fashionable neighborhood, and elevated Teenie to the dignity of housekeeper with servants to order about. Debonair gave up his studies with a fine pretense of looking after his mother's business affairs.

During the few weeks of upheaval after her husband's funeral, when she had been suddenly transformed into the wealthy woman of Mullein, she had gone about feeling that she breathed rarified air. A certain hauteur stole over her as she saw the pose old acquaintances took. Some stood off timidly as people do,

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who watch the chief man in a parade. Others thronged about her. Their sycophancy became tiresome, then offensive. She had been glad to move into the city. She lived next door to people who were as wealthy as she was. She tried to carry herself with the air of having spent money lavishly all her life. She exchanged home-made clothes for garments which bore the stamp of expensive tailors, and revelled in things which seemed happiness made tangible.

She bought flowers and books with reckless extravagance. An exquisitely upholstered motor stood waiting at the door, and the butler set dishes before her which she ate on faith without daring to ask their ingredients. But sometimes when she paused to think about it she realized she was not happy, she was not even contented.

She stood staring down at the lawn, where a negro pushed a mower about with slow deliberation. It was still early in September but the world had grown drab and colorless. Rain had not fallen for months, leaves were withering on the trees or had been wind-swept into sheltered corners of the garden. There were dead, yellow patches on the lawn where a hot sun had burned out the grass roots. Nothing wore a luxuriant air except the salvia and a vast bed of giant cannas. Their intense scarlet dazzled her like a flash of fire-works.

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"I hate it! I hate it!" She spoke under her breath with a half-frightened energy. "I hate it just as Deb does, poor boy. I know how he feels and yet I don't dare to tell him so."

She pulled down the window and darkened the room. The breeze that swept in was hotter than the still air of the house. She wandered into the bedroom and laved her face in cool water, then changed the black gown she had worn down street for a sheer white thing that billowed about her softly. She stood beside the mirror brushing out her long, bright hair, when the door opened and Teenie walked in with an inscrutable look on her grim face.

CHAPTER IV

A HERALD OF THE CAUSE

"DID you want me?" asked Cynthia.
"There's a woman in the parlor. I've dune my best tae get rid o' her. I micht as weel have saved my wind!" Teenie spoke with stolid resignation.

"Who is she?"

A grim smile wrinkled the servant's mouth.

"An auld fricht o' a Duchess was the terror o' the haill country at hame. This one looks like her."

"What do you suppose the—the Duchess wants?"

"She winna tell me. Here's her carte."

"Miss Cornelia Billup. I never heard of her. What a name! I'm curious to see how a real Duchess looks. I'll be down in a minute. Tell her so."

She turned to the mirror and began to pin up her hair.

"Cry oot my name if you want me," suggested the servant as she left the room. "It would be a great pleasure tae me tae turn the hose on Miss Billup."

Teenie's idea of coolness was a sanctimonious gloom, and the parlor was dark when Mrs.

Pike entered. She searched for a moment blindly as one does when coming in from the dazzle of sunshine. Through an unclosed chink of the shutters a thin gleam of light fell across the floor. A woman rose from a low chair and crossed the pathway of sunshine to meet her. Cynthia stared at her visitor in blank amazement, for her ideal of a British Duchess had suddenly fallen to below par.

The woman was short, her body was square, and her face had a tense, muscular expression. Her small black eyes were unflinching and her chin sprouted like a hairy cactus.

"I am Miss Billup," she announced in a deep tone like the growl of a low-pitched bass, which had been rasped and worn by long, unkindly usage.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Cynthia courteously.

The woman paid no heed to the invitation. She lifted a shiny black bag from the floor and slung it over her shoulder. Across the front of it in tall, white letters blazed, "Votes for Women."

"Gracious, it's a suffrage lady," thought Mrs. Pike.

"You know what I stand for?" The woman struck her bag with a resounding slap.

"I've heard of the work you do," Cynthia smiled faintly. "Is there anything you want?"

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"Want!" The suffragist's voice boomed out as if she were trying to make it penetrate acres of atmosphere. "Want, madame! Years ago—in the dim ages which antedated civilization—man—that puny thing we call by courtesy a man—began to trample on our sex with the ruthless imagination that he was our superior. The primitive woman licked the dust at his feet until—until, madame, the worm turned—she had kissed the rod and her soul loathed it—then, like Paladin in all her glory she arose and fled to the tented fields, followed by cohorts—each one panting and eager to light the torch of battle."

Miss Billup paused for a moment to cough harshly. Cynthia Pike retreated slowly backward until she stood in the doorway gazing in consternation at her visitor.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

The woman cleared her throat and took up the oration where she had paused.

"At last we have routed the enemy from his camp. Victory is ours! We called for the ballot. We are achieving it! The legislatures in twelve States have gone down before our gatlings as Goliath fell before David."

"Wasn't it a sling David used?" asked Cynthia timidly.

Miss Billup paid no more heed to her interruption than if a fly had buzzed.

"With streaming colors we march across a

continent—a vast, triumphant army that demands equal suffrage and is achieving it. Before another decade has passed over your head our enemies will have fallen before our panoply—as wheat drops before a mowing machine. Madame, we go on and on and on—from ocean to ocean—facing each grim-visaged Enceladus, with the invulnerable spirit which is feminine. Feminine, madame—I repeat. The day is gone when belligerency was a mere masculine trait. Today it is ours. Behold us!—trainbands of us!—going forth from our homes undismayed—leaving with a tearful good-by all whom we hold near and dear—carrying the war-cry to the farthest ranks—into the sod house of the far Dakotas, into the tepee of the trampled Indian woman—into the frozen fastness of Alaska—tossing our banners to the breeze and shouting, ‘To your tents, O Israel!’ ”

The woman stopped. Her voice had worn to a hoarse whisper.

“Why, it is wonderful,—I had no idea you faced such odds.”

While Cynthia Pike searched distractedly in her mind for words which seemed adequate to meet such heroics, she felt half a terror, half a ridiculous inclination to laugh.

“Won’t you sit down and rest? It’s terribly hot today. I should think you would find this weather trying for—war.”

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"Trying?" repeated Miss Billup in a croaking whisper. "Do you imagine that after thirty-seven years of combat, I would strike my colors because of heat?" The contempt in her broken voice was withering. "Madame, neither flood nor fire—cyclone, earthquake nor whirlwind—could turn me aside from the cannon's mouth. I stand ready to march straight on to victory. As I told you, we have conquered twelve States, and before another generation grows old we will stand victorious watching the waves of the broad Atlantic break upon shores where *every* woman can vote."

"Will she vote?"

"WILL SHE VOTE?" Miss Billup's voice broke in staccato gasps. "Did the negro grasp at his freedom when Lincoln struck the shackles from his feet? Does a convict gulp in the cool air of liberty as he walks out free from the prison gate? Can our sex do aught but vote? Would they look back upon what we have dared and suffered, upon the life blood we have spilt, upon the fortunes we have spent and—refuse to vote? Will she vote? She *must* vote!"

There was a look of terror in Cynthia Pike's eyes. If only Teenie would come and put her massive body between her and the mad Duchess! She had a horrible certainty that the woman was insane.

"You must be thirsty," she suggested, "let me get you something to drink."

Miss Billup dropped as if from sheer exhaustion, into the nearest chair.

"Teenie," called her mistress, "tell Emeline to make lemonade and bring it here at once."

"Yes," answered the Scotswoman immediately.

Cynthia felt relieved. If it were necessary to carry the mad Duchess out bodily, she felt certain Teenie could do it.

While she stood waiting to hear the tinkle of ice in the glasses, her visitor lifted the strap of the bag over her head and dropped it to the floor. It gaped open and scattered a medley of literature over the rug.

"Don't try to talk any more now," soothed Cynthia. "You are worn out. The red dust gets into your throat and leaves you parched. Before you realize it, you lose your voice. It has happened to me many a time."

A gleam of astonished gratitude flashed into the gnarled face, as if human sympathy was a commodity seldom handed out to her.

"You've got it about right," she whispered hoarsely. "I've talked so many years for a living that my voice is like a worn-out buzz saw."

"Oh, you do it for a living? I thought from what you said it was simply because you wanted women to have suffrage."

"Of course I want to see women have suffrage." There was a tone of quick hostility

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in Miss Billup's voice. "Only a human being's got to live, hasn't she?"

"Why, of course."

Teenie entered, proffering the lemonade with fierce hospitality, then grim as a gargoyle, stood watching the woman drink. She did not speak as she filled the glass a second time.

"It is right good," murmured Miss Billup. "I hadn't any idea till I got to drinking, how dry I was."

"Teenie, pick up Miss Billup's pamphlets, won't you?" asked the mistress.

The Scotchwoman dropped rebelliously to her knees. She lifted the literature in loose bunches and crammed it into the shabby bag. Then she rose to her feet waiting in glum silence until the suffragist drained her glass and set it on the tray.

"Now, Miss Billup, what can I do for you?" asked Cynthia briskly.

"We want you to join our cause."

"Oh, I would not vote for anything in the world. My husband thought it perfectly dreadful for women to go to the polls. Besides, I don't know any more about politics than I do about,—about Timbuctoo, for instance."

"Any woman with a teaspoonful of brains can learn all there is to know about politics. You've got a teaspoonful, haven't you?"

"I hope so."

"Of course, you have," acceded the visitor

cheerfully. "Anyone with half an eye can see that you have more than average intellect. I hear you have more than average wealth. What we need in our cause is the woman of intellect, also the woman who possesses the sinews of war."

"Oh, you want money?" Mrs. Pike spoke in a tone of relief.

"Yes, money is vital for every public movement."

"How much?"

"Oh,"—Miss Billup gasped as if her task was proving almost too easy,—"the amount is left wholly to individual generosity and to what faith the—"

"Victim?" suggested Mrs. Pike.

"Mercy, no." A flush of anger blazed into the suffragist's face. "I was going to say—the convert has in our cause."

"I am not a convert yet. Suppose, after I study the question I have no faith in it, then my generosity might be quite limited."

"We are thankful for the smallest contributions. We sell our paper"—she fumbled in her sack for a meager pamphlet—"this only costs ten cents."

"Ten cents! Do you tramp around the city on a torrid day like this, breaking into a home for ten cents?"

"I do not break into a home." Miss Billup's voice grew haughty. "You are a woman,

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a woman of property. Our campaign is carried on against the biggest odds, by women like myself, who have faith in it. I have worked for thirty-seven years simply that I might help women like you."

"How extraordinarily disinterested."

"Not a bit of it." Miss Billup grew more cheerful. "It means helping every woman in America."

"How?"

"That is a vast question. We have tons of literature that will tell you how. The greatest orators of our sex have thrown in their lot with our cause and found a new argument each day of the week why woman should have the ballot. They see constantly some new grade of degradation, from which our sex can be raised—some new thralldom from which a woman can be set free. You are under some bond of thralldom yourself, perhaps?"

"No," cried Cynthia breathlessly, "my husband is dead." A sudden wave of crimson blazed into her face. "I mean he left me perfectly foot-loose in every way."

"Perfectly foot-loose?" Miss Billup's laugh was a sneer. "No woman is perfectly foot-loose. Our shoulders are bowed by the yoke of ages."

Cynthia with a quick unconscious movement straightened herself as if tossing off an invisible burden.

"Apparently," argued the suffragist, "we seem content and free, yet from birth we go about the world dragging at our feet an iron ball and chain. The ring a man puts on your finger at the wedding ceremony is a bond of slavery."

"I did not think of it in that way before."

Mrs. Pike fingered the heavy ring on her left hand. It had begun to grow tight for her and was not easily moved.

"Are you content?"

Cynthia stared at the eager, uncomely face of the woman, who was transfixing her with a stare which could not be evaded.

"Are you content?" asked Miss Billup again.

"I have everything which can make a woman content. I have a beautiful home, a boy who loves me dearly, I don't have to worry about money—there is—"

"You have no vote."

"I tell you I don't want a vote. I know nothing about politics."

"It is your business to know."

Cynthia Pike rose to her feet.

"I believe I know my own business."

"No, you don't." Miss Billup's black eyes were bent upon her unflinchingly.

"There are thousands of things in the world more interesting than politics."

"Interesting, but not vital," retorted the suffragist.

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"What do you want me to be?"

"A citizen in democracy."

"Why, this is growing funny." Cynthia began to laugh. "I am so ignorant I don't know what you mean."

"Are you willing to learn?" cried the woman impetuously. She sorted out a handful of pamphlets from her bag.

"I don't know whether I am or not. It is so hot, I don't feel like reading. That stuff looks uninteresting."

"You will find it enthralling. Promise me to read this, and this, and this."

Miss Billup thrust a bunch of tracts into her hands.

"I will do my best, only what could a woman do to help our State, for instance?"

"No State in the Union needs help so much as Oklahoma does. Her railroads are the worst in the United States. She requires new public buildings, colleges, irrigation, new forestry laws, good roads; then see our oil fields, what about them? Don't they need legislation?"

"Oh!" Cynthia Pike's eyes grew suddenly alert. "If women took a hand at it, could they help about the oil fields?"

"Could they?" repeated Miss Billup. "Why, if they got together and kept at it they could force the Congress of the United States to electrocute the entire Central Oil Company."

"Really?"

"There is not a ghost of a doubt about it." The suffragist spoke with tense solemnity, dropped the strap of the bag over her shoulder, and shifted its weight under one arm.

"Do you want money now?" asked Cynthia.

"I don't believe I do," said Miss Billup slowly. "You have treated me like a lady, considerably more like a lady than most folks do. I'm used to having doors shut in my face. More than one woman in this town has 'sicked' her dog on me. I believe you will come over to our side. Can I bring our League President, Mrs. Win Schaffer, with me some day? She's done more for our cause than any woman in this State. If you should come over to our side, it would do you good. You need a new interest in life."

"I wonder if I do, Teenie?" mused Cynthia, when the servant returned after shutting the door behind Miss Billup.

"Do what?"

"Need a new interest in life."

"Maybe ye do an' maybe ye don't. Anyway, whatever ye do, dinna tak' up wi' any wild-eyed Bedlamite like that woman. She's the Duchess tae the very trim o' her beard."

"Was the Duchess a suffragist?"

"Suffragist?" repeated Teenie. "Ma'am, she was as rampant as the lion an' the unicorn fightin' for the crown. She was a lawless auld

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besom jist like that yin. I nicht listen tae them preach their heids aff, they couldna' budge me one inch."

"Have you heard women rant as Miss Billup did?"

"Heard them? The auld country's full o' them,—idle huzzies, stampedin' the whole length an' breadth of it—forgettin' ony manners they ever had an' lyin' like auld Sapphira hersel'."

"About what?"

"Oh, promisin' bigger wages an' easier times an' meeker husbands an' cheaper bread an' every blessin' under the canopy. Before I come over here I used tae work in a mill. I've tell't you that?"

"Yes."

"At noon-time, just before the mill gates opened tae lat us gang home, the Duchess would drive up in her carriage an' wait for us tae come out. We got sickened o' the sight o' her an' us hurryin', for there was time too lang tae eat. She was nae great shakes at talkin' hersel' so she brought a woman along wi' her—one o' what they call their braw speakers. Up the dame would get on a barrel top an' begin tae heckle us. If we'd believed a' she said aboot oor richts an' the scandalous way we're treated, she could hae made us waur than discontent."

"Didn't you listen to her, Teenie?"

"Not as a rule," answered the Scotchwoman

abruptly. "One noon-time, I remember, the suffrage lady stood there outside the gate, mounted on a barrow, waitin' for us. It was poorin', the very deluge. She had an umbrella over her heid but we got soakin' wet afore we reached the mill gate. We ran richt oot by her. The men hooted at her an' some o' us laughed. She was the maddest cantrip ye ever laid eyes on. Jeanie Yule, a frien' o' mine, was just ahead o' me. The suffrage lady snatched off the wee shawl Jeanie had tied roon her heid tae keep her dry. She wisped it up and struck Jeanie wi' it across the face.

" 'I'll take nae mair o' yer insults,' she cried. 'You—you unmannerly swine—you! The idea o' me standin' here in the rain, givin' up my life tae help you—an' be treated like this—me—a lady wi' a college education!'

"Jeanie's face got bleedin' red. She pulled the wet shawlie from her han' an' luiked up at her.

" 'College education is it—an'—a lady—an' smack a workin' lass when she passes ye by—a workin' lass that isn't a sayin' one word in return for a' the hecklin' ye gie us. A lady! Tae hell wi' ladies like you! I thank God I'm nothin' but a weaver!'

" 'Teenie!' cried Mrs. Pike in a shocked tone.

" 'Weel, I'm tellin' ye what happened. Jeanie did richt. If she hadna had the spunk tae gie her what she deserved, I'd hae dane it mysel'."

CHAPTER V

CHECKMATING OLYMPIA

THAT autumn in Oklahoma City, with its soul-calling winds, its wilting heats, its season deluges and gray frosts, was a strangely formative period in Cynthia Pike's life. She had been shut away from the world almost as completely as Mariana in her Moated Grange. Then, crossing the drawbridge, she had come into a world teeming with life and experience. She picked up books and music which others had pushed aside as *passé*, and reveled in them with a joy as fresh as a child's.

She turned delightedly to newspapers, and began to look on at a wonderful new world which grew strangely vivid before her gaze. She luxuriated in beautiful gowns, jewels, and wonderful hats. Each one, as she donned it before a mirror, brought to view a beauty she had never dreamed was hers, a fresh glow of color in her cheeks, a sheen in her hair and lustre in her eyes. She had dreamed of facing old age, but this was youth!

One day, when the radiance of her life was dimmed by only one thing, weary aimlessness,

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Mrs. Win Schaffer, the president of the Suffrage League, called upon her.

The first thing Cynthia Pike recognized in the woman was strength. It showed in her large strong nose and steadfast gray eyes. She was an elderly woman with a family of grown-up children. Doctrines, which had sounded like the libretto of a comic opera from Miss Billup, gained dignity and force when spoken with quiet earnestness by Mrs. Schaffer. At first the dogmas of a suffragist's creed bewildered the younger woman and seemed like the demolition of all she had been taught to believe. But when the meaning of strange tenets dawned upon her intelligence, they became tangible, then interesting, at last attractive.

Before Spring stole North across the Texan prairies, Cynthia Pike was a full-fledged suffragist. Mrs. Schaffer had happened into her life at a psychological moment, when she was ready to seize with mad activity any distraction which would occupy her brain and hands. Had a Buddhist, or a fire-worshipper, crossed her path, instead of a lady waving the yellow flag of feminine rebellion, the result would have been about the same. Cynthia was merely a woman who had missed her youth.

At seventeen, when she might have exhausted the exuberance of girlhood and drained her vitality by ridiculous fads or the sports young women take up today, she had married and be-

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gun to undergo a slow, strangulated process which had almost reduced her to mental atrophy. At first there had been moments of mad rebellion. When she ran full tilt against the quiet, cold tyranny of her husband, she had felt physically bruised in the rebound. Insurrection was as utterly, insanely useless as beating at a stone wall. Once,—that once she remembered till the last moment of her life,—she had paused for breath like a shrieking child and met a frigid, indifferent stare in her husband's eyes. Suddenly she realized the utter futility of resistance.

From that day she had met his every command with cold, quiet submission. Cynthia Pike was not the type of woman who tortures her mind by self analysis, a form of tribunal which belongs to the human being gifted with too much or too little brain. She merely realized that eighteen years of her existence had been lost from the calendar, lost so far as the joy of living was concerned. She did not bemoan those days because the future was now one joyous flush. Heedless of convention, and thrilled by anticipation, she set herself to wring from the present every delight which seemed to lie between her and the horizon, every delight which had been denied her in the past.

Oklahoma City was not a town of social conventions. Once it had been a Mecca for divorcees, and perhaps that short era of conven-

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ture had blunted its moral sensibilities. Therefore when a widow, freshly bereaved but superbly youthful and superbly wealthy, came tripping cheerfully across its path, society in the Southwestern town did not shrug its shoulders as a Northern community might have done. It held out the right hand of fellowship, and when woman suffrage was achieved it set Cynthia Pike where she belonged by right of wealth, sheer enthusiasm, and her unalloyed delight in living.

The old leaders of the movement, who had faced hopeless, self-denying, toilsome years, accepted suffrage with a delight which was almost incredulous, with grim determination and momentous gravity. They began to formulate plans which would change the very scheme of creation and set man where he belonged, on a footstool. Their plans, however, called for money.

Mrs. Schaffer had taken Cynthia Pike's measure accurately. She saw her eagerness, her childlike simplicity, and a gnawing unrest which at first had puzzled the older and wiser woman. Years of experience had taught her lessons about human nature, especially the feminine side of it. She had come close to ambition for power and notoriety and Cynthia perplexed her. There was not a trace of petty jealousy in her make-up, nor any of the small, narrow sins we call feminine.

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"Mrs. Pike is the most unusual woman I ever met," Mrs. Schaffer confided to Olympia Smythe, the secretary of the League. "She has no pose, she is simple and perfectly straightforward, she does not concern herself with what people think about her, still she is as eager to be in the thick of things as—well, as Mrs. Hemsicker for instance. Mrs. Pike is different from the Hemsicker woman. The night my Sammy won the football game, his class carried him home on their shoulders. He never slept a wink till morning. It was sheer delight over victory with him. Mrs. Pike's like Sammy."

"Set her in the spotlight then," advised Miss Smythe. "We will need bucketfuls of money this Fall."

"Somehow," confessed Mrs. Schaffer, "it seems like taking candy from a baby."

"You are the only one who can do it," insisted Miss Smythe. "She worships you. She is so confiding that you can do anything with her."

"That's why I hate the job."

"Don't be squeamish. She ought to be our best card. I never saw a woman change so. I thought her dowdy and washed-out the first time I met her. I don't know if it's because she's dressing better or—"

"No, she's happier," mused Mrs. Schaffer. "A man was telling me about her the other night, a man who has known her since she was

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a girl. It seems Pike was a frost-bitten old tyrant. For eighteen years he kept her nailed down toiling her life away in a little bungalow on the edge of Mullein. She's simply on the recoil from that brand of civilization."

"I see," acceded Miss Smythe coldly. "Also she is a genuine windfall to our party."

"Perhaps." The color flushed into the face of the older woman. "Only, in a way it seems mean to take advantage of her eagerness and anticipation."

"Nonsense!" There was a haughty smile on the secretary's face while she drew on her gloves. "Nonsense, she will get excellent returns for her money,—returns that she could not get in any other way."

Jane Hagner, the old war-horse of the suffrage party in the Southwest, sat in a corner counting her stitches as she cast them on the long bone knitting-needles.

"Good-by," she said, as Olympia left the room. "Fifty, fifty-five, fifty-six, seven, eight." Then she glanced up with a question in her keen eyes. "Olympia wants money, hey?"

"Doesn't everybody want money?" asked Mrs. Schaffer quietly. "We can't use Suffrage to any great extent now we've got it—with an empty exchequer. Can we?"

There was a chilling lack of sympathy in Jane Hagner's voice.

"Fifty-nine, sixty, sixty-one—two—three,"

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she counted calmly. "Perhaps you can't. It's darned unpleasant to have no money, but not vital."

"I should say it was vital."

"Not if it's goin' to be laid out on what Olympia has in mind."

"What?"

"You hain't an idea o' the scheme she's hatchin' in that calculatin' brain o' hers!"

"No. What are you driving at? I've been away two weeks, you know. Almost anything might happen in two weeks, though nothing out of the common has come to my ears. What does Olympia want of Mrs. Pike's money?"

"Sixty-four, sixty-five, six, seven, eight," counted the old woman.

"Why don't you explain?" asked Mrs. Schaffer impatiently.

"Olympia's got the craziest bug in her bonnet that was ever hatched. It come to me in sech a roundabout way I don't hardly dare whisper it out loud."

"You can tell it to me, can't you?"

"I reckon I can. Well, Olympia's plannin' to run for Congress against Pederick Wiggins!"

"My stars!" cried Mrs. Schaffer blankly. She rose to her feet and ran up a curtain as if she desired more light on the situation.

"Reuben got the news straight from a man

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who knows. She's layin' low, waitin' to see how the cat jumps, only—"

"What in time put that in her head?" Ellen Schaffer spoke almost mechanically.

"Olympia's a mighty slick proposition, she's got things many a time by layin' low when other folks lost out by fightin' for them. Only I'll take my hat off to her if she ever goes to Congress."

"Goes to Congress!" repeated Ellen Schaffer with a curl of her lip. "I'll see to it that she don't go to Congress!"

"When Reuben told me, I laughed till I ached. I've quit laughin'. I'm watchin' Olympia. She thinks we'll need pots of money in the Fall, eh?"

"Who's going to run on the Republican ticket from our district?"

"William Prince of Orange McCroy."

Mrs. Schaffer laughed. "William's an institution like—like St. Patrick."

"They say Pederick Wiggins has nerve enough to try for another term. He hasn't a fightin' chance. Pederick's forehead bulges like Socrates, only there's a hull tenement back of it to rent."

Mrs. Schaffer looked up sharply.

"He'd never try after the way he's been shown up."

"He'll be gunnin' for the nomination before six weeks pass or—I miss my guess."

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"Why," Ellen Schaffer laughed contemptuously, "he'd be beaten out of his boots at the primary."

"Just the same, he'll run."

"And, who else?"

Mrs. Schaffer leaned back in her chair, turned her steady gaze on the old woman who sat beside the window knitting, and bit her lower lip impatiently.

"Nobody that I've heard tell of."

"Just Pederick Williams and William Prince of Orange McCroy?"

"I haven't heard another soul mentioned—so far."

"What would you think—" Mrs. Schaffer looked over the top of her glasses and coughed, "of our league putting up a candidate?"

"Olympia?"

"No."

"Who?"

"Cynthia Pike."

Jane Hagner's answer was a grunt of approval.

"I've got just one qualm about it. Since I've come back I've listened to no end of stories about that De Lany case where Mrs. Pike and Olympia were on the jury. Do you know about it?"

"I reckon I do." Mrs. Hagner paused to pick up a stitch she had dropped. "I set out the whole thing."

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"What did Mrs. Pike do to turn some of the women against her?"

"Not a thing." Jane Hagner dropped the knitting in her lap. "Mrs. Richmond sued Miss De Lany because she didn't put a feather on to her hat that she paid for, and then the milliner charged seven dollars more than she'd agreed to."

"She's done tricks like that to every woman in town."

"Mrs. Pike came into court late. She laughed when the woman got to arguin' about whether it was proper to keep on hats or not when they served on a jury. Along about noon the whole bunch got restless. Some of them had tickets for the matinee an' one was goin' to a bridge party. At five the lawyers were still examin'in' the witnesses. Old Miss Dooley sat there mumblin' an' fussin' an' fidgettin'. When the closin' argument began she burst out, 'Oh, Lord! Do we have to listen to that all over again?' "

"No wonder the papers made fun of them."

"It was as good's a side show. Mrs. Pike sat between Miss Dooley and Olympia. They were both nasty to her. She got back at them, though. She kept them there all night, one against eleven. She didn't give in till she felt ready to go home for breakfast. Olympia has it in for her."

"Why?"

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"I don't know exactly, unless she lumps Mrs. Pike with the bloated monopolists an' the oil barons she's eternally thunderin' against."

"Plain, everyday jealousy," observed Mrs. Schaffer abruptly.

"You've just about hit it." The old woman bent forward with an eager look in her eyes. "Ellen Schaffer," she asked, "did you ever play checkers?"

"Yes, only I'm a pretty poor hand at it, why do you ask?"

"I can't think of anything I'd like to do better than play a nice, quiet game with Olympia an' look into her eyes after I'd moved my man an' she knew she was checkmated!"

CHAPTER VI

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

"I DON'T believe," began Cynthia Pike in a low voice, "that I—understand—exactly. Tell me again what you want me to do."

"I ask you,"—Mrs. Schaffer spoke with a tone of brusque decision,—"every woman in the Suffrage League of the Tenth District asks you to run for Congress on the Republican ticket."

Cynthia began to laugh, then paused with a half breathless gasp as she caught a glimpse of Mrs. Schaffer's face.

"Why, do you know it strikes me as the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life."

"I am sorry you feel that way." Mrs. Schaffer's eyes were bent upon her with quiet, accusing gravity.

"Sorry? Why?"

"Simply because I came to you on a most important mission and you treat it as if it were an invitation to go to the Midway."

"I'm afraid," faltered Cynthia, "it seems to me like a Midway."

"It is nothing of the sort. Thirty thousand women with the interests of their country, their State, their homes, and their future at heart,

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are waiting to lay their fate in your hands."

Mrs. Pike disentangled a kimono sleeve which had caught on the arm of her chair, then rose slowly to her feet. There was a curiously startled expression in her eyes as she stood looking down at the woman beside her.

"Do you understand?" asked Mrs. Schaffer.

"You want me—me—to run for Congress?"

"Yes."

"There are nobody but men in Congress?"

"You are right. It is one rank injustice our sex has endured for nearly two hundred years."

"How many Congressmen are there?"

"More than four hundred."

"And you want me—me—who knows nothing of the world, who has scarcely set foot outside of Oklahoma—to be the one woman amongst them?"

"Yes."

"Well, I won't. I'm not brazen enough for that."

"Brazen! My dear child." Mrs. Schaffer laid her hand upon Cynthia's arm. "A brazen woman is the last type we would choose to represent us. You do not realize what a compliment this is. It means that from all of our sex—the two hundred thousand persons of this district—you are the only possibility."

"Why?"

Mrs. Schaffer paused for a moment as if assorting her arguments.

"You have made good here,—not because you have money," she added quickly. "Other women in this city and district have money, but a woman like you does not drop into a community every day. You have a curious power of leadership. For the life of me I can't tell just what it is. For one thing you are a good woman, you are enthusiastic and generous, you have brains and if you have not had experience in the ways of the world, you have a knack of getting down to real things and setting aside pin-head conventions that the average woman hasn't. Then I don't believe you would be apt to get the big head. That's the ruination of so many women. You—"

"Don't tell me anything more," cried Cynthia with a tremulous laugh, "I'm not so sure about my head,—it might—"

"No." Mrs. Schaffer looked at her gravely. "I know what I'm talking about. I've lived in this world for sixty-three years with my eyes wide open."

"What could I do for you in Congress?"

"What every Congressman in Washington does, represent us and get the legislation we want."

Cynthia began to laugh softly.

"Dear Auntie Schaffer,—you don't mind if I call you that? Don't ask me to take this seri-

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ously. I can't. If you had suggested yourself or Cornelia Billup or Mrs. Hagner or Olympia Smythe, almost any other woman in the League, I could understand, but me—"

"Everything is against my going," explained Mrs. Schaffer. "A woman's mirror teaches her common sense. I am plain looking, and old, with plain country ways. You can send the queerest old masculine fossil that can be dug up to Congress and nobody cares a whoop what he looks like. They've had such a variegated assortment there since the days of George Washington that nothing agitates them. But when it comes to the first woman, not Eve, but the first Congresswoman, we've got to pick the choicest thing in sight,—as we do when we send the biggest pumpkin to a fair."

"Thank you." A vague smile flitted across Cynthia's face.

"Besides, I'm out of it," continued the older woman, "on account of my husband. He does not stand for suffrage. He's as quiet and tractable a man as you would meet in a day's journey but when he gets roused he's—well, he's different. He would never listen to breaking up a home if I should be considered—which I won't," she added conclusively. "Jane Hagner stands where I do. Thirty years ago she might have been our ticket. Her day is over except as a useful old war-horse. Cornelia Billup is a good, well-meaning soul; she has given

her life to the cause; but as Congresswoman Billup she would be the howling joke of a nation."

"You don't seem to take into account," suggested Cynthia, "that I have no ambition to be the howling joke of a nation."

"You wouldn't be." Mrs. Schaffer's tone was emphatic.

"I'm not so sure about that," Cynthia spoke dubiously.

"I'm sure. There's only one way to make an innovation catch on, and that is to put your best foot forward."

"Then you have decided that—I am the best foot?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Pike dropped on a sofa by the fireside and buried her face in a heap of cushions. Her shoulders trembled with laughter.

"Get up, I want to talk to you," said the older woman abruptly. "I have no time to waste. First of all, this has to be decided, and you *must* take it seriously."

Cynthia lifted her hand and smoothed her hair.

"You realize, don't you, that I don't know the first A B C of politics?"

"You are learning fast."

"Don't you understand, a man has to be up on history, law, and the affairs of a nation before he can go to Congress?"

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"Yes, and quite frequently he isn't."

"Just the same he ought to be. Why, dear," she caught the hand of the older woman between her own, "I appreciate everything—the compliment you pay me, your loyalty and friendliness, your faith in me, and everything else, only it's the most absurd thing ever dreamed of."

"Why absurd?"

Cynthia Pike's face grew suddenly grave for it dawned upon her that the woman was in deadly earnest.

"Please don't say anything more about it," she pleaded. "Don't try to be serious. Why it's so funny—I shall remember it as the most absurd thing that ever happened in my life."

Mrs. Schaffer rose to her feet with her eyebrows set in an ominous frown.

"Mrs. Pike," she said dryly, "this is not a joke. We have all decided—"

"What, have other people talked about this as well as you?"

"We haven't talked about it, we have laid our plans."

"Taking it for granted that you could shove me around like a domino?"

Cynthia rose and began to walk excitedly about the room, with her gray kimono billowing in silky waves.

"You are quite mistaken," she cried decisively. "I have had lots of fun out of the suf-

frage business now, and it put me in the way of knowing people I like, but I'm not going to be made any howling joke for the whole United States. I may be countrified, and crude; your Miss Smythe called me 'downright raw' once,—you know it,—I heard about it. I am crude and countrified and raw perhaps, only—" She laughed abruptly. "As Teenie says, 'I'm not as green as I'm cabbage looking.'"

A wave of color broke over the face of the elderly woman.

"That wasn't right. I was there when Olympia Smythe said it. I gave her a piece of my mind. Women are like that, at least a good many of them are,—they will take all you give, then rend you as soon as your back is turned. I want you to know that that is not my way."

"That's why I wished to call you Auntie Schaffer," cried Cynthia with a trembling laugh. "Don't you suppose I know, even if I did live for eighteen years on the edge of nowhere, don't you suppose I know the best and the worst of them?"

"We all do. Here I go on fighting for our sex and once in a while the thought comes over me, 'Are they worth it?' They are. There's more of the worth-while brand than the other kind. I have lain awake nights and reckoned them up. Even Olympia Smythe has good streaks. The matter with her is she's jealous and bitter. She's an unplucked peony, her

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petals are beginning to shed off, and she feels it."

"Forgive me," cried Cynthia in quick contrition. "Talk all you want to about these plans. I'll listen and I won't interrupt, even if I don't promise to do everything you seem to have set your heart on. I simply can't become The Howling Joke."

"My dear, you couldn't. When a woman is as attractive as you are, she doesn't become a joke. Poor Cornelia or Miss Smythe might,—for one thing they take themselves so seriously. They are pretty well informed too."

"I told you they were."

"Yes, only that sort of woman is not taken seriously by anyone but herself. Nothing is so deadly to any cause as making it funny when we want it looked at in solemn earnest."

"They won't take me in earnest. Why do you think they would?"

"Let me show you why."

Mrs. Schaffer led Cynthia in front of a tall mirror. Her face flushed as she looked at the reflection. She realized that she looked singularly young and radiant.

"That's why," said the older woman conclusively. "The man under the gray dome of the Capitol may be as deadly in earnest as we want him to be; he may have brains; but he is human, and there is chivalry left in our men, if this is an unchivalrous age. My idea is that a

woman who looks as you do, and the only woman there, could do what she wanted to and get what she wanted in the way of legislature."

"Just the same, Auntie Schaffer," said Cynthia, "I'm not going to do it. I hate to disappoint you for I love you," she added softly, "but don't ask me to do this. I'll give you money, lots of it. There must be some other woman among two hundred thousand who is fitted for this much better than I am. Why," she cried as she saw the disappointment in the face of the woman beside her, "I am ready to help in any way I can. You can have my house, morning, noon, and night, every room in it, except the kitchen and the bedrooms, for meetings or anything you wish, but, don't ask me to do this. You have been so good to me, it is harder to say 'no' to you than to anyone else."

Mrs. Schaffer did not speak.

"I have grown fond of you. I never knew what a good neighbor meant till I met you. You have made life down here different for me. I have loved everything that has happened so far, our parades and meetings, our hikes and speechifying, even that ridiculous old hat trial, why it was no end of fun, but this—"

Cynthia jumped to her feet. She heard the door open and Debonair calling her. She returned with her arm twined inside that of the tall handsome lad.

"I left you without a word of excuse," she

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explained to Mrs. Schaffer. "I haven't seen my boy for two weeks. He has been off for a vacation at the Prindell ranch. Had a good time, Sonnie?"

"Good time, I should say so! The time of my life! I wouldn't have come home only I wanted to see you. You are such an old Jim Dandy, Mother, I feel as proud of you as if you were running for Congress."

"Running for Congress?" repeated Mrs. Pike with a startled glance. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, standing out on the hen jury as you did for that pie-faced old milliner."

"Why, Sonnie," she cried with a rippling laugh, "it was great fun. I stood out against the verdict partly because I grew sorry for the idiotic little Miss De Lany—partly—"

"Mother, wasn't she the one you got so mad at this Spring, who cheated you on a Spring hat?"

"Yes."

"When you had a chance to bat her in the eye, why in time didn't you do it?" asked the boy incredulously.

"Somehow before the trial was over, I grew sorry for her. She was such a poor sniveling old thing and looks so,—she has two front teeth gone. I never talked to a human being as I did that day, Sonnie, I have felt ashamed of myself ever since."

"Yes, I was with you. Was that the only reason you stood out against the verdict?"

"No," said his mother thoughtfully. "I detest Miss Bloodgood Smythe, she is so, oh, I don't know what—I simply hate her."

"Great Scott, Mother, what a daisy of a jury-woman you did make!"

"That wasn't all. I believe I had an obstinate fit. Old Miss Dooley sat next to me. She was unpleasant and so insolent I made up my mind I would not vote as she did."

"Then after all, you lost out."

"Yes, only I kept Miss Dooley there all night. She is a medium. She had a date on for a trance and was losing money. She scarcely dared to whisper about it, she is so afraid of the police."

"Mother," the boy threw back his shoulders and laughed. "Mother, I say, you're a peach of a politician!"

"Sonnie, that's exactly what I've been trying to explain to Mrs. Schaffer. Help me to show her how ridiculous the whole thing is, she is trying—imagine—Debonair—she is trying to make me—run for Congress!"

"Run for Congress! You? You? Mother!"

Cynthia Pike nodded gravely.

"On a hit-and-miss ticket?" gasped the lad between outbursts of laughter.

Mrs. Schaffer rose to her feet with a look of offended dignity.

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"No, on the straight Republican ticket," said the elderly woman in a stiff voice. "I hope you will both pardon me for mentioning it. I realize now that I made a monumental mistake."

"Mrs. Schaffer," said Debonair quietly, "I wish you would sit down and talk the whole business over with me."

"With you? You're not offering yourself as a candidate, are you?" asked the woman calmly. "You're not eligible until you cast your first vote."

"No," cried the lad eagerly. There was not a trace of offense in his voice. "Great Scott, no. Wouldn't you like a tin-type of me loafing round the House of Representatives. I was thinking of Mother. I can swing Mother round as I want to. It strikes me that she would make a rattling good fellow for the job."

Cynthia Pike turned to her son with undisguised astonishment. "Why," she cried, "all of you are—crazy!" She paused as if words failed her and stared from one to the other. A look of fright grew in her eyes. "Neither of you know what you are talking about."

"It seems to me rather a neat idea," said Debonair slowly. "You can deliver the goods. I imagine it will take considerable money to break into a job like that, but as Member of Congress from the Tenth District of Oklahoma you would certainly be Johnny on the Spot. Nobody knows what else might happen. These

old suffs—pardon me, Mrs. Schaffer," he said apologetically,—“claim a woman will run things at the White House some day. Think of that, Mother! The White House! Things are certainly coming our way!”

CHAPTER VII

CYNTHIA IS PEDESTALED

THE Suffrage League of the Tenth District of Oklahoma held a strange motley of femininity. It included elderly single women, who felt defrauded of something which might have made life worth while, malcontents with weird grievances, theorists, females who craved notoriety, discontented wives, and a few women of really lofty ideals. The largest class, however, was made up of the restless and emotional, who followed fresh lures as they had done since childhood when they dropped into the procession behind a circus.

Cynthia Pike found herself pedestaled in this circle by virtue of unfettered wealth. Besides, when everyday acquaintances had dissolved the golden halo, women found her a buoyant creature with child-like faith in human nature. Sheer magnetism in itself would have given her the reins of leadership because it made her loved and trusted by her own sex.

Although nominations were not due until June, the suffragists of the Tenth District inaugurated their campaign long before Spring

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arrived. By right of seniority and a grasp of public affairs the elder women of the League held an advantage which they grasped tenaciously. They realized it might be wrested from them any day by aggressive young members, who boasted of a college education, contact with the stirring Northern world, and a knowledge of parliamentary law. Besides, the old members had watched men play the political game and they dreaded being swept into the scrap heap.

If Olympia Smythe smarted from a frustrated ambition, she hid the ache bravely, and became head and front of the campaign to place Cynthia in Congress.

"We must string Main Street with banners from end to end," she announced one day at a meeting in the Schaffer home. "I presume you are ready to finance the banners, Mrs. Pike?"

"Certainly, get all the banners you wish."

"I am not an artist,"—Olympia spoke in a half apologetic tone,—"but last night I thought out what seemed to me an unusual banner design. May I show you a rough sketch of it?"

The women crowded about to glance over her shoulder.

"I should suggest that instead of making banners of the narrow style which stretch across a street, we have them long and deep like this."

"Wouldn't they tangle up in trolley poles or

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round a horse's head?" asked Miss Billup anxiously.

"Certainly not." There was a note of disdain in Miss Smythe's voice. "I had not dreamed of having them so absurdly long as that. What I advise is Liberty enlightening the world, then take her torch away and set in her hand a full-length portrait of Mrs. Pike."

"Don't," cried Cynthia, "I have no ambition to be a burlesque."

"This is no burlesque," replied Miss Smythe calmly. "You are quite too modest for a candidate."

Jane Hagner sat in the group knitting quietly. Although placid and ponderous, she held the whip-hand of affairs as she had done during twenty years of authority.

"Let me see your drawing," she demanded. The secretary handed it to her reluctantly.

"You are no great shakes at drawing, Olympia, that's a fact. I'm glad you explained it,—if I hadn't known it was Liberty I might have mistook it for William J. Bryan. Hain't you made the old girl pretty colossal?"

"Liberty is colossal," Olympia's tone was icy.

"I reckon she is, only if you're goin' to set Mrs. Pike in her hand she won't show up bigger'n a flea."

"I intend to dwarf Liberty and make Mrs. Pike colossal."

"Oh!"

"Why should you use my portrait?" objected Cynthia. "Why not fly the stars and stripes, or a banner with my name on it? Isn't that the way men do?"

"This campaign," Miss Smythe coughed slightly, "is not designed wholly to boom *you*. We are making a carefully staged appeal for our party. As I understand, I was chosen to run the publicity end of it. We must fling our banners to the breeze, hundreds of them. They will cost money, still there is no better way to advertise than banners. You all agree with me?"

"I reckon so," assented Mrs. Hagner. "Only I'm with Cornelia. See that they don't get to larrupin' round our necks when we go down town. If they do, the whole League will be run into court as a public nuisance."

"We want the finest pictures you can get, Mrs. Pike," continued Olympia suavely. "I would like to pose you myself in the gray and black gown you wore at Clay's the other night, with your diamond tiara. A picture of that sort makes people stop and look in a window."

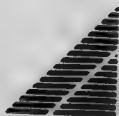
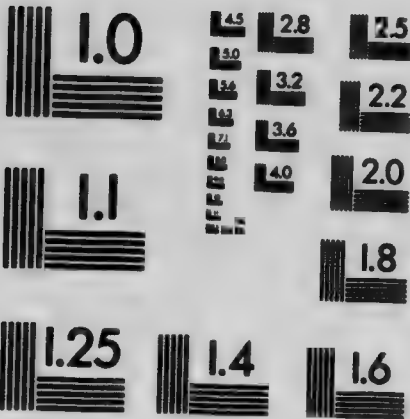
"In a window?" repeated Cynthia. "That is how they advertise a cheap actress."

"Billing store and house windows is the best sort of advertising. If they get stunning pictures people will hang them out whether they are Democrats or Republicans."



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Cynthia laughed. "I seem to be growing accustomed to anything. Only, somehow, it is so sudden. Only a year ago—"

"Certainly, a year ago nobody had heard your name!" Miss Smythe's brisk tone was a sword thrust.

The women's voices wrangling over details came to Cynthia like a mere babble of words. Her eyes turned to a brood of sparrows hopping about a peach tree near the window. Suddenly they flew down to peck at the lawn, only to return with a swift rush of wings and eager chirping. She remembered how she had watched them a year ago—she could hardly realize it was only a year ago—when they had flickered about the dreary little yard at Mullein. She recollected how she felt while she stared at them, tired of life, tired of her husband, listless, half rebellious, yet living along from one day to another with a mute anticipation of what the next twenty-four hours might bring.

A girl beside her spoke in a quick imperious tone.

"Don't forget we have a lot of entertaining to do during the campaign."

Cynthia's hands dropped to her lap and she turned to stare at the girl. Margaret Walker was young and pretty, with a brisk, headlong manner. Miss Smythe called her "obviously modernistic." She had just returned from a Northern college. She was set in her own opin-

ions and had a faculty for carrying things as she planned.

"Yes," said Miss Smythe, thoughtfully, "we ought to entertain. This should be the liveliest season the town has seen for years. I have been studying the methods English women use to help their husbands in an election. They are splendid mixers, as men put it. They drink tea with the humblest people, entertain their tenants, dance with their servants, kiss the babies, and are friendly with all classes simply because John Jones's vote is as valuable as Montmorency Delkenshamp's—"

"Who is Montmorency Delkenshamp?" asked Miss Billup.

"He is merely a figure of speech," Miss Smythe drew herself up haughtily.

"I would suggest bridge parties," broke in the college girl, "then a few dances and teas—perhaps a paper chase and theatricals or a kirmess and something in the opera house. Church socials will help. The picnic season will soon be here. Father says a picnic is a political pudding."

"Perhaps,"—Mrs. Hagner glanced over her spectacles to transfix the girl with her sharp eyes, "only will you tell me who's goin' to pay the orchestra for you sylphs to dance?"

"Miss Smythe said we were going to have pots of money—that Mrs. Pike was generosity itself."

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She turned an eager glance toward Cynthia.

"What if she is?" asked Mrs. Hagner.

"This is a campaign of education. Literature and speakers have to be taken care of first. They will cost a pretty penny. After that, if there's any cash left, we may pay for your piping."

"Does anybody know,"—Mrs. Schaffer stepped into the breach—"just how men set about grooming a candidate? That's what they call it, isn't it?"

"Yes." Olympia lifted her head with an important gesture. "I talked it over with Uncle Phil last night. Twelve years ago, when he lived in Ohio, he ran for Congress."

"And won?" Mrs. Hagner did not glance up from her knitting as she asked the question.

"No." There was an acid tone in Miss Smythe's voice. "No, he lost. That Fal' a Democratic President and the entire Democratic party were defeated. It was a regular Republican landslide."

"I've been hearing of Republican landslides, so it seems to me, ever since I was an infant."

Olympia turned a chilly glance upon the old lady. Mrs. Hagner did not lift her head. She knitted industriously on a large gray shawl and the bone needles clicked aggressively.

"When I asked Uncle Bill how he set about getting the nomination he said he took Dennis Mack into his confidence, who went to the editor

of the county paper. They named a dozen men in the party, who might be good timber—remember I am telling this in Uncle Phil's words—and Dennis asked suddenly, 'What would you think of Phil Smythe?' 'I don't see,' said the editor, 'why we didn't think of Smythe sooner, he wouldn't be half bad.' Dennis suggested half a dozen men whom nobody in the district would have dreamed of voting for. 'No,' said the editor, 'when you get down to brass tacks, Phil Smythe's the man.' For a week Dennis went all over the district dropping a hint here and there. Everywhere the papers began to mention Uncle Phil's name. They spoke of him as an honest man, who stood staunch for the party. Some of them ran his name at the top of the editorial column as their candidate. Uncle Phil went driving all over the district to call on every one he ever met. He stopped at country stores, at factories and creameries when the men were going home from work, and told them what the government ought to do for them and what it had not done. He spoke at every fair and picnic and meeting in the district. The editors who stood for him printed his speeches. He sent baskets of his finest peaches and apples to the newspaper offices. Aunt Lydia is famous for her canned fruits. During the Fall she gave it away to all sorts of people."

"Why," Mrs. Hagner did not raise her eyes

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from the gray worsted shawl, "wan't it keepin' well?"

"Of course it was, it was as fine as any she ever put up." Olympia spoke testily. "Oh, by the way, Uncle Phil was emphatic about drummers. He says drummers can help a candidate more than anyone if you get on the right side of them."

"I move," suggested Jane Hagner, "that Miss Smythe be authorized to get out the drummers' vote."

"No, thank you," Olympia shrugged her shoulders. "That is the merest outline of what Uncle Phil said. It gives an idea of how men run for office. The first thing he knew he won the nomination."

"And got licked election day?" Mrs. Hagner's knitting needles clicked like an accompaniment of castanets to each word in her question.

"Yes, only I told you the entire ticket was defeated that year."

Mrs. Pike rose to her feet and pulled down her veil.

"Ladies, I want you to understand," she said slowly, "before we begin a campaign, that I will not go racing round the district electioneering as Miss Smythe's uncle did, if it would land me in the White House."

"Dear me!" Olympia sighed as the front door closed behind her. "I would never have

dreamed if I had not seen it that Mrs. Pike had so much spirit!"

"No, would you now?" Jane Hagner laid down her knitting and gazed at the secretary with profound gravity. "For my part I'm with her. I'm glad she has so much spirit. We've been on the lose for years because our party's been short on spirit, and dignity—the right kind of spirit, I mean. So far as I am concerned folks who don't admire Mrs. Pike's brand of dignity, can go across the road for all of me!"

CHAPTER VIII

REBELLION IN THE CAMP

“**W**HAT is the next thing to do?” asked Cynthia, who sat beside her desk at Suffrage headquarters.

“Let me think.” Mrs. Schaffer threw a glance at the open door between them and a room where typewriters clicked. She rose to shut it, then returned to her chair.

“It seems to me we have schemes enough now to elect a President, let alone a congressman,—congresswoman, I mean. I hate to drop one, and yet half a dozen well worked up ought to see us through. We expect to carry the entire vote; we’ll let the Prince of Orange get a decent minority. It would break his heart if he didn’t. You’ve never seen McCroy?”

“No,” Cynthia smiled. “Somebody said today that he is as queer as Dick’s hatband and hides away on his ranch through an entire campaign.”

“He’s queerer than the hatband, no matter how outlandish it was. This is the fifth time McCroy’s name has been on the Republican ticket.”

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Jane Hagner glanced up from her eternal knitting.

"Don't worry about William Prince of Orange McCroy," she advised calmly. "What feazes me is, he sets back just as happy after he's been licked as if he'd won,—sets back an' waits for the next campaign. Somebody always backs him. I hope death don't come along some time an' take him when a campaign's just begun. He'd hate to go before the vote was counted."

"It seems cruel to beat him." Cynthia spoke compassionately.

"Don't waste sympathy on William. It's the only runnin' he was ever known to do."

"It ought to be easy to knock him out of the ring," observed Debonair listlessly.

"We won't waste much powder and shot on William. Better save it for Pederick Wiggins," advised Jane Hagner.

"Pshaw!" Debonair lit a cigar. "He hasn't a ghost of a chance. The Republican party's in poor shape if it can't put up a better man than Wiggins."

"Mark my words,"—the old woman's knitting needles clicked aggressively,—"Pederick Wiggins will sit out the dance or I miss my guess."

Debonair shrugged his shoulders.

"Mrs. Pike, why isn't that boy in school, or at work?"

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"He's studying now. He's going to take his examinations for college in the Fall."

"In the meantime, young man,"—Mrs. Hagner looked up and transfixed the lad with her stern gaze,—“what are you planning to do?”

"There are several strenuous months ahead of me getting Mother elected."

"Upon my soul, you're a strenuous looking proposition!"

Debonair laughed. Every time he and Mrs. Hagner met they fell to sparring. Intuitively, however, the boy knew she was fond of him, although she never confessed to it.

Cynthia Pike's headquarters had been established in the finest hotel that Oklahoma City provided. As Debonair lolled beside the window, he glanced proudly at banners, which flaunted his mother's name and her radiant face. She had grown so young and handsome that besides the old love the boy felt a new proud adoration.

In the adjacent room typewriters tapped incessantly and the phone kept up a steady jangle. Stacks of mail were littered over tables, heaped in corners, or crushed into plethoric sacks. His mother, who sat with her eyes bent upon a manuscript, occasionally smiled as she read it through.

"Is your speech funny?" asked the boy. She rose to close the window beside her.

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"I don't know whether it is or not. I can't think for the racket on the street. I want to try it on a dog,—isn't that what they say? You folks must listen,—I have to practice on some one. Criticise, as you wish, though I don't promise to change it, not one word of it, unless it strikes me as an improvement."

"Good for you, be a man!" said Jane Hagner enthusiastically.

Olympia Smythe, who had not spoken before, looked up from her desk in a distant corner of the room.

"Mrs. Pike, are you not undertaking more than the average woman is equal to? You need not carry everything in the campaign yourself. A year ago, you confess, you had never heard of suffrage. Writing your own speeches is really more than we had expected of you."

"Why," Cynthia turned a startled gaze upon her, "if I don't write them, who will?"

"I had not given that a thought. It simply occurred to me that you are shouldering a Sisyphean task in preparing your own speeches."

"Did you think, for one minute, that I would get up and make a speech which had been written for me by someone else, and take the applause for it or have it printed in the paper over my name?"

"That is what American statesmen do. Half the speeches in the Congressional Record are written by clever young secretaries who groom

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a representative in all sorts of ways before he makes a speech."

"Will you tell me,"—Jane Hagner impaled Miss Smythe with one look,—"where you got that idea?"

"That," answered the secretary airily, "is ancient history. Uncle Phil says so, for one."

"The Uncle Phil who lost his election?"

Miss Smythe did not deign to reply.

"If you're takin' up politics serious, Olympia," said the old lady, "I'd advise you to quit swallowin' everything you see in the paper for gospel truth. There's a fair average of honest brainy men in the Congress of the United States, even if we suffragists don't allow it,—above our breath."

"Whether there are or not," said Cynthia sturdily, "if I have to read a speech written by a youngster who knows no more than Debonair does I step right out now. You remember, Auntie Schaffer," she turned to the old woman appealingly, "at first I had not the slightest ambition to be your nominee. If I do keep on I write my own speeches. If I don't, I give you notice now that I quit."

"Good for you." Jane Hagner's gray shawl dropped to the floor and she clapped her hands vigorously.

Miss Smythe did not speak. A frosty breath seemed to chill the atmosphere.

"I think, myself, Mrs. Pike," Jane Hagner

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spoke reflectively, "though I believe you're right, that it's too bad you insist on working both ends of this pump handle yourself."

"If you say that," Cynthia turned upon her in grave amazement, "there must be something in it. Why?"

"Only this." The old lady stooped to pick up a ball of yarn which fell to the floor. "Only this,—Olympia might turn out some real flowery speeches for you. They tell me she has scrap books pasted full of oratory that would lift you clear off your feet. It's easy as winkin' to take that sort o' thing an' fagot it into shape. They say, too, you'd never guess it wan't all straight goods. You've never heard Miss Smythe in a debate, have you? My! she gets off some of the finest English you ever listened to."

"I was never so grossly insulted in my life!"

Olympia Smythe pulled the cover down over her desk. Her voice trembled with rage and a dull red flush burned in her cheeks. "Why should I write speeches for Mrs. Pike?" she asked with a contemptuous laugh. "She is perfectly equipped to give her turnip seed constituents the vernacular they understand. Decent English would be wasted on the Tenth District."

"It beats me, Olympia," Mrs. Hagner spoke with quiet deliberation, "what makes you cast in your lot with this yap country. Your mental works are too big for us altogether."

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The secretary did not answer. She put on her hat, stabbed a pin through it, lifted a handful of papers from her desk, and went out closing the door behind her with a vicious bang.

"Jane Hagner, you've got that girl mad," cried Mrs. Schaffer protestingly. "There wasn't one bit of need of it. Goodness knows what she'll do next. She may bolt an' go over to—we don't know what."

"Let her. Did you ever hear tell of David Baird's mother when she was told her son had been captured an' chained to another prisoner? 'My,' says she, 'I do pity the man that my Davy's tied to.' That's the way I feel about any party Olympia takes up with."

"Yes, I know, only what good did it do?"

"I never had one mite of use for Olympia Bloodgood Smythe. I've knowed her since she was five years old. She was a cold, calculatin' little rat then, lookin' out for number one an' wantin' to be at the top o' the heap all the time. My young ones went to school with her. I've seen them come home listenin' to her spit out the meanest things just as she does today. Don't ask me to set back, weighin' out every word I say to Olympia as I would an ounce o' flaxseed."

"I don't care any more about Olympia than you do," confessed Mrs. Schaffer. "Only our party isn't old enough, or strong enough, yet,

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to send anybody that's friendly to us,—off in a grouch."

Debonair began to hum softly—

"They rent her limb from limb

While the harbor bar was moaning."

Jane Hagner laughed.

"All right, Sonnie, me for peace! I guess, anyway, Olympia ain't worth scrappin' over. Her fool ways come to her natural. Her father was a good ordinary sort o' citizen till he got engaged to Sophronia Beall. We'd always known him as John B. Smith. One mornin' I got weddin' cards that read, 'J. Bloodgood Smythe to Sophronia Beall.' 'For the land sakes,' says I to Reuben, 'who's J. Bloodgood Smythe? I never heard such a butchery-soundin' name in all my life.' 'You've got me,' says he. We never suspicioned it being John B. Smith till they come back from their weddin' trip."

"I'm scared stiff at what she'll do," mused Mrs. Schaffer. "Olympia has an awful vengeful streak in her. I've seen it."

"Don't worry one mite." Jane Hagner laughed as she bent over her knitting. "She's been workin' on her fiddlin' little essays and poems for months. I know!" she added, pointing one finger over her shoulder. "A drawer in that desk is full of the worst piffle you ever read. If she gets a chance to run it out, the

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antis will have something to poke fun at. Now, my dear," she turned to Cynthia, "Ellen Schaffer and me are through scrappin'. Let's have your speech."

"If you think somebody else—" began Cynthia nervously, "who knows more than I do, ought to write my speeches, say so. I won't feel one bit hurt. Only remember, if I use something that isn't mine, I shall tell who wrote it."

"You sail in and let's hear what you've got. Don't worry about me not tellin' you the truth. Truth's my long suit, every time."

Cynthia began to unfold a bunch of typewritten paper.

"Get to your feet and pound away as if we were the great unwashed. You might as well practice on us as anybody."

"I'll try. Debonair, if you smile I'll put you out of the room."

"Mother, look at me, I am as grave as the Constitution."

Cynthia turned to lean awkwardly against the desk.

"See here," Mrs. Hagner laid down her knitting. "You wouldn't take any points from Olympia Smythe. That's right, only listen to me. You've got to put some ginger into your pantomime. Many a first-class speech has been wasted on the desert air because a speaker got his gymnastics tied up in a knot."

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The old woman rose to her feet and threw out one muscular arm with an impressive lunge.

"Go in for gestures like that! Slam bang all you're capable of. There's nothing country folks enjoy more'n watchin' a speaker work himself into a drippin' sweat. I reckon it's plain human nature; the pleasure o' settin' back an' takin' life easy while we watch somebody else work. Now, bat out as if Olympia was in front o' you and you was fightin' mad."

Cynthia burst into a peal of laughter.

"That's good." The old lady applauded. "Laugh, nothin' limbers folks up like a laugh. Now, go ahead, child, I'll knit as if I were possessed, so don't give me a thought. I'm no great hand for compliments but I'll say this, you're a sight pleasanter to look at than any spike-tailed wind-jammer I ever saw standin' alongside o' a little table with a glass of water on it. Get in all the spread-eagle spasms you know how without rippin' open your kimono sleeves."

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Cynthia in a half-choked voice. "That's right, isn't it?"

"It certainly is." Mrs. Hagner nodded approvingly. "You'd say Ladies and Gentlemen if there wan't nothin' human in sight but a cigar store Indian."

"I have come before you today," continued Cynthia, "emboldened by the hope that I may be able to make you see through our eyes why

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sixty thousand women in this district want to be represented, by one of their own sex, in the Congress of the United States. For one hundred and fifty years the legislation of this great continent has been entrusted to the nobler sex—”

“Cut out nobler,” interrupted Mrs. Schaffer, “we don’t concede that point.”

“To the—other sex,” amended Cynthia lamely. “Today a change has come over the spirit of our dreams. In the eighteenth century women were willing to stay at home as Martha Washington did, relegating to the men of their households the affairs of state. The world has moved since that time. Today woman holds the center of the stage. The time has come when man no longer boasts of his rights, he is struggling feebly to hold on to the privileges we deign to grant him.”

“Bravo!” cried Debonair.

“Sonnie,” his mother looked down at him with a flush in her cheeks. “If you open your mouth again I will put you out of the room. Remember you are here simply as we allow your sex to exist—on sufferance. We want our rights, our privileges, our opinions. We refuse to sit with folded hands on the back bench of the world. We refuse to take for granted such wisdom as you hand out to us upon silver platters. We have wearied of letting you dictate each law of our everyday life. We are fitted to

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make laws for ourselves. Like Lady Macbeth, we stand behind each faint-hearted spouse inciting him to—"

"If I were you, child," interrupted Jane Hagner, "I'd find some decenter female to put forward than that bloodthirsty Scotchwoman. Remember she spurred her old man on to somewhat gory stunts."

"Of course," agreed Cynthia. "I see the point. Every day our interests grow more complex and our outlook wider. We are no longer the clinging vine but the sturdy oak. We are not content to be mere attributes of creation, we must be up and doing. Politics today are as foul as the Augean stables. Like Hercules, we stand ready to clean them out. Let us have a hand at it. Let us show you what we can do. If need be, disenfranchise the men and give us a hand at steering the ship."

"I don't believe," advised Mrs. Schaffer, "that I would go quite as far as that. We can't achieve the ballot by stepping over the dead bodies of all the men in America. I doubt if I want to. I've put in thirty-two years now under the same roof with Win Schaffer,—he's a fairly decent specimen—as men go. Where did you find that sentence?"

"I adapted that," confessed Cynthia lamely, "it was in a speech Zenobia Plumb Poland made a few weeks ago."

"It sounds like Zenobia. She's too ad-

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vanced for me. We would be nearer victory if they put a strait-jacket on Zenobia and women of her kind."

"I guess you're right," acquiesced Mrs. Pike. "It does sound militant." Gradually the stage fright left her and Cynthia fell into the spirit of her harangue. She had a good voice. It penetrated without a trace of shrillness, and when she forgot her audience she gained in ease and grace. She dropped the manuscript as she spoke the last word and turned her eyes on the trio beside her.

"Bully for you, Mother!" cried Debonair.

Jane Hagner rose and laid her hand upon the younger woman's arm.

"Honey, you're goin' to make good. How do I know? I feel it in my bones. You've got more than looks in your favor. Men like a woman to be in downright earnest whether they agree with her or not. Then you don't put on any furbelows. You act as if you'd set your heart on gettin' your rights. That's where you drive it home. Men are pretty soft about givin' woman her way,—the average man, I mean. I'm ready to root for you before the game's called."

"I'm with Jane Hagner in every word she said." Mrs. Schaffer spoke with quiet earnestness.

"Don't you think, Mother," asked Debonair, "I might order my page costume now? They'll

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let me carry your train, won't they, when you float down the aisle to take your seat in the House of Representatives?"

"Come, Debonair," Mrs. Schaffer rose and began to gather a bunch of letters from the table in front of her. "We've got to send the mail out. There's a bushel of it in the next room."

"Mrs. Hagner,"—Cynthia looked over her shoulder as the boy closed the door behind him,—"will you tell me something, the solemn, honest truth about something?"

"I certainly will, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you get me in a corner."

"It's this." Mrs. Pike's eyes danced with laughter. "Down in the bottom of your heart, are you a suffragist? I mean an out-and-out, rampagious, frenzied suffragist?"

The old lady laughed merrily, then she grew calmly serious.

"Child, many a time I've heared Reub Hagner say there's nothin' on earth shows up human nature in men like settin' out a poker game. He swears it's worth losin' a few dollars to watch folks' dispositions. I've seen more assorted brands of female character settin' out the suffrage game than you could find in any other diversion under the sun. If there's one thing I love, it's to study human nature. Besides, a woman's got to have something more to

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occupy her mind than just knittin' or cookin' for a man or darnin' his socks an' creasin' his pants. So, it's n' for suffrage! 'Taint goin' to hurt women much unless they get too riotous. I never went so far's some o' them do. I don't say the time's ripe for a man to eat out o' a woman's hand. If that happens—the Lord knows what will come to pass next."

"You dear old fraud!" cried Cynthia.

CHAPTER IX

WILLIAM PRINCE OF ORANGE MC CROY

"**M**OTHER," whispered Debonair, "how does it feel to wade through gobs of glory?"

The lad's face flushed with triumph as he stood beside his mother. He flung one arm about her with an air of proud ownership and kissed her cheek. She turned to smile at him abstractedly as she leaned against the piazza rail staring down into the faces of an excited throng.

"The Tower o' Babel was a Quaker meetin' compared tae this," observed Teenie. "I never thought I'd live tae see the day when folks would gang daft as warlocks ower a woman in politics."

"Can't you squeeze out one smile, Teenie—one little smile?" asked Debonair. "You look like a dill pickle."

He turned away quickly. Some one on the lawn was calling "Speech."

"Speech!" repeated his mother. "They couldn't hear me speak through a megaphone."

The returns which came in over the wire told

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of an overwhelming victory for woman suffrage at the primaries. There could be no doubt of the results even if figures from outlying districts had not arrived. Men were trying stupidly to explain the situation. Perhaps the novelty of the campaign had touched a general emotionalism; chivalry also had lent its aid. The contemptuous record of Wiggins stood for his defeat, while William Prince of Orange McCroy was a joke.

The suffragists received the news of their triumph with astounded silence; afterwards came a tumult beside which the uproar of a man's victory was a whisper. The mob came crushing to the doorstep of Mrs. Pike's home, and packed the street for an entire block.

Hundreds of people were trying to speak to Cynthia at once. She answered questions and received congratulations through a daze she could not shake off. For the past month or two she had gone about buoyed by the enthusiasm of friends. It had not seemed so much like living, as it did floating on waves of adulation and excitement. She loved the motion, the sunshine, and each fresh sensation that publicity brought. Besides it felt like transmigration from the drab existence which some other body like her own had once endured.

That commonplace life was past, past forever. There never could be anything like Mullein again. She thought of Mullein with a

quick shudder, while she watched the mob waving banners, shouting her name, and cheering till it paused because of actual hoarseness. An electric lamp threw a white gleam across the sea of faces before her. Here and there she saw some one she knew, but many of the people were strangers. She wondered where they had come from and why they should go stark staring crazy because she stood there smiling at them.

At the edge of the crowd a boyish voice called Debonair's name. The same voice began to sing. She smiled,—it was a ridiculous bit of doggerel children sang in school. Debonair's clear young voice joined in.

During a pause some one behind her in the parlor touched a few chords on the piano and through the open window floated a soprano voice.

My Country, 'tis of Thee,
Sweet land of Liberty.

She sang a few words herself, then stopped disconcerted. Teenie was chanting in her ear—

God save our gracious King,
Long live our noble King.

The multitude grew song-wild. "Dixie," the "Star Spangled Banner," and "Yankee Doodle" swept across it like contagion. A moment

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of silence followed as if it had exhausted breath and repertoire; then she heard a girl on the piazza beside her break into one of their suffrage hymns.

Women, who have toiled and fought,
Who for suffrage long have sought,
Trying to turn public thought,
Have won the victory.
Toss your banners to the breeze,
Shout the news across the seas,
Three cheers for our devotees
All for liberty.

The ovation lasted till midnight. The last guest to say good-night was Mrs. Hagner. Her husband waited for her at the front door.

"Jane," he remonstrated, "it's struck twelve."

"I don't care if it's struck twenty." The old lady's face flamed with triumph and excitement. "Tomorrow mornin' will bring the dawn of new freedom for our sex. Toddle home alone, Reuben. We've got to begin overturnin' old-fashioned customs and conventions from now on. What's the sense of a man takin' his wife home? Nobody's goin' to lay a hand on me between here an' Plum Street. If they do—! It's my job hereafter to escort you home."

"Not in this neck of the woods." A stolid smile flickered across the old man's face.

"From now on, each member of your tyrannical sex is goin' to set back and see the world flop over. One of the first things we'll legislate for is female policemen. Why not? There's Teenie! What a strappin' police-woman she'd make!"

"You dinna run me in on any sic' job as that." The Scotchwoman's voice was refractory.

"It will go through just the same. You won't find a wife settin' up till daylight for her husband when women police our streets." Mrs. Hagner nodded triumphantly. "We've won in the legislature. Now we're goin' to be represented in Congress—"

"Hold your horses, Jane," interrupted her husband. "Mrs. Pike isn't in Congress yet. You women don't get it through your heads, the difference between a primary and an election. There's a stiff fight ahead of you with Burke Beverly to lick."

"Burke Beverly!" cried the old woman contemptuously. "You don't suppose the tenth district would send anything as corrupt as Beverly to represent it in Congress?"

"You can't tell anything about it," Reub Hagner spoke reflectively. "Beverly's got money an' backin', an' he'll fight to the drop of the hat,—besides, he won't fight fair. You women don't organize, you don't know how, and you won't let us offer you a guidin' hand."

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You plan things like you was givin' a pink tea."

"Pshaw! Come along home. You can take my arm if you want to."

"Deb." Mrs. Pike turned to her son when they were left alone. "Go straight to bed. Tomorrow morning we begin work in dead earnest. As Mrs. Hagner says, the fighting has just begun."

"Aren't you coming in, Mother?" asked the boy.

"No, I want to sit out here and think."

"Shall I stay by you?" proffered Teenie.

"No, go to bed."

The servant did not heed her. She leaned over the railing and stared at the moonlit yard.

"My soul! Did you ever see sic' destruction in all your life? The lawn's trampled doon tae black sod. Look at the rose bushes, an' they waur jist beginnin' tae bloom."

"It does look bad," acceded Cynthia. "Don't worry, Silas can fix it up in a day or two."

"Can he?" grumbled the servant. "It's no goin' tae bide fixed. Before November you'll hae bigger croods than cam' the nicht. Deliver me frae a country whaur there's no wall roon' a garden. I canna bide this livin' oot in plain sicht o' fowks."

"Go to bed, Teenie, and forget your troubles," advised her mistress.

Cynthia moved slowly down the steps and

wandered across the trampled lawn, lifting her filmy gown ankle high, for a heavy dew had fallen. She was bending over a broken rose bush when she looked up with a startled cry. A shadow had fallen between her and the moonlight.

"Where did you come from?" she asked.

A man stood before her, a man she had never seen before. He was tall and loose-jointed. His clothes hung upon him slouchily. He wore a blue shirt with a soft, turned-down collar which showed his gaunt neck. A glaring red and purple tie was knotted into a slovenly, lopsided bow. He held a Panama hat in his hand and stared at her with mild, gray eyes.

"I hope you will forgive my intruding at such a time of night," he explained, with a flickering smile. "I waited till the crowd had gone. I am William Prince of Orange McCroy. I came to offer my congratulations."

"Oh," cried Cynthia, "forgive me for defeating you."

"Don't speak of it." A gentle smile wrinkled his face. "I never thought of winning. I'm accustomed to a minority. I came out second this time."

"I am glad." There was a hearty ring in the woman's voice.

"This is the fifth time I've congratulated the man who won. I don't know how to speak my little piece to a lady."

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"Don't. I'm tired to death of speeches. Come up on the piazza and talk to me."

"It's late." The man hesitated.

"Never mind, it's a heavenly night. I feel as wide awake as when I got up this morning."

"You've had an exciting day."

"I've had an exciting three months. Come."

The man followed her slowly and seated himself on the highest step of the piazza, resting his head against a pillar. Cynthia dropped into a low chair beside him.

"It was kind of you to come with congratulations," she began.

"Kind? I had not thought of it that way."

"I don't know whether I should have congratulated you or not, if I had been defeated."

"You would," he answered simply. "It is a matter of political courtesy."

"I did not know there was such a thing as political courtesy."

"There is. I have met with a good deal of it in my time."

"I don't believe," mused Cynthia, "that there is much of it among women."

"Women haven't been in politics long enough to learn the tricks of the game."

"Have you?"

"I have run for Congress five times. The papers do not treat me as they do some candidates—" An engaging smile lit his face.

"Sometimes they get funny and joke about my name. Once they printed my genealogy from 1688. They have written verses about me, but they have never been cruel."

"How could they be?" asked Cynthia softly.

"Only, what made you wish to go to Congress, of all places?"

It suddenly occurred to the woman that this curiously vague, impractical individual was as far removed from her ideal of a statesman as she was herself. He did not answer, he seemed to have missed her question.

"I asked why you want to go to Congress?" she repeated.

"I don't know." He ran his fingers through his hair and stared at her perplexedly. "At first I wanted to get the country to use a cannon I invented. It knocks a man down, when a blast of compressed air strikes him, but it does not hurt him. I had an idea you could do away with bloodshed, if you fooled through a war with a weapon like that. You know what Sherman said about war is terribly true."

"Yes."

"You asked why I ran this time. I believe it was to boom the baby alligator business."

"The baby alligator business!"

Cynthia wondered if he was sane. When he raised his eyes and smiled at her confidently she felt a quick throb of shame for the mere suspicion she had held.

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"I don't understand," she confessed.

"Most people wouldn't. They are terribly interesting."

"Who are interesting?"

"Baby alligators."

"Oh!"

"Have you ever watched them?"

"I have seen them in a tank at the park." The woman shuddered. "I thought them perfectly hideous."

"They are the most human little creatures that ever lived."

"No?" cried Cynthia, then she laughed gaily.

"They are. If you become attached to a baby alligator you are not satisfied when it is out of your sight. They are much more interesting than cats. Babies love them."

"Have you any babies?"

"No, ma'am, I live alone except for Shamus, and the alligators."

"Who is Shamus?"

"Shamus is my man. He's an old sailor who helps me to invent things. He has a wonderful mind, although he has only one leg. I could never have invented the deathless cannon if it had not been for Shamus."

"Does he do your work,—housework, I mean?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How does he manage with one leg?"

"He lost it so many years ago that he does

not miss it now. He won't wear a wooden one. I invented five of them, but he prefers a crutch. Shamus is wonderful except when he has a turn."

"A turn! Does he have fits?"

"No, it is not so bad as that. He drinks. All old sailors drink. I should never have found Shamus if he had not been drunk. I was driving home one night in the dark,—I don't know why I didn't kill him. The wheel went over his crutch. I heard it snap. I jumped out to see what it was." He shuddered. "It might have been his leg,—fortunately it was not. He had run away from the poorhouse. His one terror is that he may be discovered and taken back."

"Like a foundling?"

"Yes," said McCroy. "I do not tell this to people. I don't know why I spoke of it to you."

"Didn't they treat him kindly at the poorhouse?"

"No, they made him take a bath and change his clothes once a week. Then, they do not allow him whiskey."

"I thought you stood for prohibition?"

"I"—McCroy paused thoughtfully,—"I forgot, I did put a prohibition plank in my platform."

"Still, you allow Shamus to drink?"

"He drinks twice a year. He drinks as I take calomel. He has to."

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"Why?"

"I don't know exactly." The man looked at her in perplexity. "When he came to live with me he explained that he had turns. Still—he is as faithful as—Alcestis."

"Who was Alcestis?"

"A lady who died for her husband, I believe, thousands of years ago."

"Would Shamus die for you?" A smile fitted across Cynthia's face as she asked the question.

"I believe he would."

McCroy turned his face away and wandered off into a dreamland world. His eyes were bent on the piazza floor, where gray shadows danced when the wind moved the leaves of a catalpa tree. The languor of the night stole over her senses and Cynthia forgot the very existence of William Prince of Orange McCroy.

She glanced up when he rose to his feet.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Home. Your clock struck one a few minutes ago. Didn't you hear it?"

"No."

"May I leave my card? My address is on it. If I can help you during your campaign, won't you send for me? I will do anything you ask."

"Thank you."

She laughed softly. An odd feeling of friendliness for the man crept over her al-

though she had not known him for an hour. He seemed incoherent, yet lovable, like some odd creature from a fairy tale.

"It strikes me," he looked at her with sudden gravity in his kindly eyes, "that a woman is going to have a big job to carry a campaign through. It is not easy for men. I cannot understand," he paused as if searching in his mind for words he wanted, "why you should wish to go into politics. A lady as—as beautiful and as gracious as you are can have what she sets her heart upon without legislating for it. A man would lay anything you desired at your feet. He would not even allow you to ask for it if he dreamed you wished it."

"Men have not treated me so." A strangling sob rose in Cynthia's throat as she made the confession. She was contrasting the only man she had known well with this tranquil scientist.

"I don't know whether I could do anything for you." McCroy smiled doubtfully. "Burke Beverly's a bad man, and he will fight you without mercy. He won't treat a woman more courteously than he would a man who gets in his way when he is running for office."

Cynthia stared at the card he laid in her hand.

"Where did you get your name?" she asked.

"My mother used to say William Prince of Orange was her grandfather, with ten or twelve greats in front of it. I imagine her

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genealogy was straight. I used to dislike the name when I went to college,—the boys had no end of fun with it,—but I do not mind it now."

"William of Orange was a prince and statesman, wasn't he?"

"Yes,—he was not much of a warrior. Mother said things came his way without fighting for them. They have not come to me that way," he mused.

"Don't you believe you are as happy as if you had gone to Congress?"

"I believe I am almost a happy."

"Good-night." Cynthia held out her hand to him.

"Good-night." He held her fingers in a lingering grasp and gazed into her eyes with guileless admiration. "If Shamus or I can help during your campaign, won't you send for us? We can leave the alligators at any time."

The woman watched the tall, shambling figure move slowly down the moonlit street.

"A woman would have to face strange odds to pick out a man like that to fight her battles."

Cynthia smiled, then her face grew thoughtful.

CHAPTER X

FEMININE CAMPAIGNING

FAR back in her girlhood, that girlhood which seemed part of another life, Cynthia remembered a delirium of a day. Even across a haze of twenty years the memory of it returned like something not terrestrial.

She could recall every minute from the dewy morning when she started for the circus in a carryall, overflowing with boys and girls as gay as herself. She had worn a blue muslin frock, her long braids were tied with blue ribbon, and her wide-brimmed hat was wreathed with forget-me-nots. As she had passed a mirror in the kitchen she remembered how she smiled at her own reflection, in sheer delight.

That day she realized what beauty meant to a girl. The beauty had been heightened by a joyous exuberance, she was the one for whom the sun shone, for whom the world was gay and green and glad. During the homeward ride she sat in a corner of the wagon beside a boy she had never seen before, a boy with wistful black eyes and an eager smile. He had told her how beautiful she was. He confessed that the circus seemed stupid to him, that pop-

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corn and peanuts had lost their flavor, he had seen nothing but the brightness of her eyes, the scarlet of her lips and the wonderful glow in her hair. He was a boy who had read poetry and dreamed poetry.

She had allowed him to kiss her. That eager tremulous kiss brought a throb to her heart and aroused a vague wonder about the future which seemed marvelous and full of happiness. She saw the black-eyed boy once after that, then a few weeks later Bunyan Pike crossed her path. He had claimed her in his peremptory way, and with scarcely one word of protest she went away with him to the heart of the red dirt desert.

"What are you thinkin' about?" asked Jane Hagner. "You've been in dreamland for half an hour."

"Have I?" asked Cynthia with a start.

"You certainly have, you've been hundreds o' miles from here."

"There was a very narrow bridge between where I stood and here."

Cynthia saw real affection in the scrutiny of the old woman's glance.

"Some day, when life quiets down a bit, tell me about yourself. I'm not curious as some folks are, I'm interested because I'm fond of you."

"Thank you." Cynthia glanced at her through eyes which brimmed with tears. "There is very little to tell. My past was as

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barren as—as this.” She flung out one hand as if to sweep the whole country about them.

The huge, powerful automobile scudded over the country road with four-leagued strides. Oklahoma had waited prayerfully through long months for rain. It came after the dry, hot winds had singed the face of the world. A lowering funnel of black clouds crept over the edge of the horizon and broke in a wild, yelping storm which sent human beings to their cyclone cellars. Afterwards the rain fell, a deluge of it, pelting the parched country steadily for days and nights. It had soaked down to the roots of half-dead grass and brought fresh, green blades upspringing as if it were springtime. It washed the dust from trees and underbrush and brought a tangle of wild flowers in the fence corners back to bloom.

Across a sky as blue as pure cobalt trailed thin clouds like gusts of soft, white steam. The air was cool and bracing and sweetened by a hundred smells of summer.

“I hate this country,” mused Cynthia, “yet on a day like this I love it.”

“It’s queer,” said Jane Hagner, “you should feel that way. You were born in the Southwest. You’ve never even seen a mountain country?”

“No.”

“If you’d come from Vermont, as I did, you’d understand how I feel down here. Some-

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times I can shut my eyes now an' see the green mountains, where pine trees grow so thick down the edges o' a ridge, that they stand out agin' the sky like a Christy knife blade." The old woman laughed. "That ain't poetical, only it's how I've seen 'em look many a time."

"How can you endure the homesickness?" asked Cynthia. "If I hate this country what has it been to you?"

"Don't talk about it." The old woman spoke tremulously. "I'd have hiked straight back if it hadn't been for Reuben. It means a deal to a man to have his wife contented. When we come South it seemed at first like pickin' up money, after the way we'd slaved and toiled on a hill-top farm. I wan't selfish enough to set down an' whimper when he was workin'. That's all."

"And you've been here?" asked Cynthia.

"Thirty-five years."

"Good Heavens! As many years as I have lived. What grit!"

"Nothin' of the kind." Jane Hagner laughed scornfully. "Reuben's a good man. He ain't what anybody would call smart, but he's honest, ridiculous honest, it seems to me sometimes. My soul! how it counts to have a man honest, alongside of them that ain't. Once't a woman puts her head under the same harness with a man, I believe in her doin' the best she knows how an' bein' contented."

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"We don't hear much of that doctrine among the suffragists."

"There's where most o' them fall down."

"I don't see how you ever took up suffrage."

Mrs. Hagner laughed.

"In the days of the old setta, when we lived in dugouts, an' civilization seemed clear over the edge of the world, I made up my mind that if I was goin' to stick it out, I'd got to have some sort o' side line—as drummers do—so I picked out suffrage."

"Why?"

"For one reason, it happened along. I reckon I'd have snatched at palmistry or Mormonism,—no, I reckon Mormonism wouldn't have caught me, only I wanted somethin'. A woman stopped with us over night. She told me how women up North were tryin' to get the ballot. She left a lot of pamphlets. We didn't have a sight o' readin' in them days, so I studied them till I knowed them by heart. It looked to me like pretty good doctrine then."

"Doesn't it now?"

"There's days when it don't. It made me fairly contented to think that perhaps off in the future we women were comin' into our own. Only it works different on different women. When I listen sometimes to Cornelia Billup bayin' at some critter that don't do her thinkin' in her own tank an' stirrin' her up till she's clear disgruntled, or see women like Olympia,

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who might have made a decent home for some man, left out in the shuffle, I set back and wonder if I did right or wrong. Only, if I hadn't started it, somebody else would an' she might have been a female agitator who'd have got to smashin' things. We hain't done that yet."

"No, not yet."

"The world's flopped clear over since I was a little girl. We were happier then,—there wan't no talk about social problems, or yearnin's for the good of humanity or philosophic idealism. We pegged along doin' our work an' makin' home the best place on earth. Mother had the knack o' that, I tell you. We did as right's we knew how and loved our neighbors,—the ones that were fit to love. We weren't half as discontented as we are today, an' today, my land! we've twice as much to be thankful for as we had then."

"You're right."

"I don't know whether I am or not." The old woman sighed. "It's like lookin' back on things you loved when you was little. I used to fancy there wan't nothin' tasted like hot molasses cake. I hain't no use for it today,—it makes me sick to even smell it. Maybe the old days would seem dull now."

She sat silent while they sped through vast cotton fields, and wide tracts where alfalfa rippled like waves on a quiet sea.

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"Dive into your basket." Mrs. Hagner aroused herself. "There's a little house ahead of us, round the bend o' the road. I've come this way before."

"Just one house in this wilderness?" cried Cynthia as the cottage came in sight. "Don't I know what that means?"

"Mother." Debonair turned to glance at her over his shoulder. "This is worse than Mullein ever thought of being. You're wasting campaign literature to throw it out in a God-forsaken hole like this. Folks who live on the edge of nowhere don't vote."

"You're right, Sonnie; it isn't campaign literature they need, it's other things. Michael, slow up," she ordered the chauffeur.

The machine paused with an impatient snort in front of a little house. Cynthia leaned over to rummage in a basket at the back of the car, then dropped a medley of bundles on the seat beside her. They stopped in front of a very little house, which had been built so recently that rain and sun had done nothing to soften its crude outlines or weather the yellow intensity of raw timber. Its fresh painted blinds were so green as to be startling. The cottage wore an air as of shame at standing naked in the sun-beaten, treeless lot. A woman sat on the doorstep with a baby in her arms. She shaded her eyes while she peered at the group in the auto.

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Cynthia, gray coated and gray veiled, leaped lightly to the road and waited for the parcels which Jane Hagner dropped into her arms. A small boy with hair which the sun had bleached to a toneless drab, ran to meet her, stubbing his bare toes through the dirt.

"What can I do for you, Sonnie?" she asked with a smile.

"Gimme a flag," he whispered breathlessly. "I never had a flag in my life."

"I am sorry, I never thought of flags," began Cynthia; then she watched the child's eyes travel to the back of the car. "Why, I had forgotten these."

She ran behind the auto, which was wound with a bandeau bearing the plea, "Vote for Suffrage and Cynthia Pike." Around it waved flags large and small.

"Of course you can have the biggest, finest flag there is."

She detached a banner of sheeny silk. The child screamed with delight when she whipped it out in the wind and put it in his outstretched hand.

"I had forgotten how a little boy loves flags. When my boy there," she pointed at Debonair, "was your age, he liked a flag better than anything else." She turned to the lad, who smiled down at her lazily. "Why, Deb, the little urchin looks exactly as you used to."

"Mother, I call that a classy compliment."

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"He does, upon my word he does. Your hair had that same bleached-out tint from living in the sun."

A shriek of delight rent the air while the bare-footed youngster leaped through the dust, shaking the flag about his head.

"Have you thanked the lady, Timmy?"

The child's mother came slowly through the chip-litter and piles of upturned sods, with a curious brood clutching at her skirts.

"Timmy, where's your manners?" she cried sharply. "Shet up your hollerin' an' thank the lady."

"Let him holler," interceded Cynthia. "He's too happy to say 'thank you.' I have something here for the other children."

She thrust parcel after parcel into eager, dirty hands.

"Ma!" cried a little girl shrilly, while she opened a box. "Look, it's candy, with lace round the edge! Say, who's the lady? She ain't Santa Claus, is she?"

"Hark." The woman spoke in a loud whisper. "I don't know who she is."

"No, she ain't Santa Claus." Jane Hagner leaned over the side of the car. "Tain't time yet for Santa Claus or else it's too early. I don't know which. I want to introduce you to Mrs. Cynthia Pike. We are goin' to send her to Congress from the tenth district of Oklahoma."

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"For the land's sake!" cried the woman; "be you the lady we've heard about?"

"Look out, don't drop your baby!" called Mrs. Hagner.

The woman nestled her arm around the child with an unconscious caress.

"My soul, don't I wish my man was home! He's off 'tendin' to his fences an'—"

"That's what I am doing," laughed Cynthia; "'tending to my fences."

"I reckon they're different fences from ours." The woman stared admiringly at the smart coat and the long silky veil which blew out like a soft cloud behind Cynthia's hat. "You don't look as if you'd ever done a day's work in your life."

"You don't know,—I have worked as hard as you have done. For years I lived in a little house like this away out from everywhere and as—"

"As lonesome as this?"

"Yes, as lonesome as this." Cynthia laid her hand upon the woman's thin arm. "You can't tell me a thing about what life is like out here. That's one reason I want to go to Congress. There must be some way, I don't know what exactly, but some way to make life more interesting and happier for people who live in places like this."

"If there only was!" cried the woman in an eager whisper. "When I was a girl I never

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dreamed of nothin' like this. I come from a town—'twan't a very big town, only 'twan't like this. When I think o' the young ones growin' up here,—oh, you don't know a thing about it."

"I do. I tell you I know everything about it."

"I wish you could help some way."

"There must be a way. If there is, I'm going to find it."

While Cynthia talked she unclasped the pink fingers of the baby, put a gold coin in its clutch, and wrapped the little fist tightly within her hand.

"I don't suppose this is the right way to campaign," she sighed; "the law says it isn't. Only I mean well, indeed I do,—"

"God bless you," cried the woman eagerly.

"Here," said Jane Hagner as Cynthia climbed into the seat by her side, "we're forgettin' to leave campaign literature. Bub," she beckoned to the youngster who stood waving his flag, and dropped a bundle of pamphlets clinched together with a clothes pin into his arms, "there, tell your father to read them through when he comes home, then go into town election day and vote for the Santa Claus lady."

Cynthia leaned back and fluttered her handkerchief until the cottage beside the red dirt road became a spot on the horizon.

"It seems to me we're runnin' a darn queer

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campaign," chuckled the old lady. "I don't know but they could clap you into the penitentiary for the money you're spendin'."

"I'm not spending it because I want to go to Congress," Cynthia spoke impatiently. "If I had thousands of millions, I wouldn't bother about making laws. What's the use of waiting for anything as slow as laws. I'd go about the world trying to make women happier and children shriek with joy as that youngster did over his flag. Why, since we began campaigning can you count the hundreds of homes like that we have passed? Homes!" she added. "What a name for them!"

"I know, and what's worse, I feel a cold terror that legislatin' ain't going to help so very much."

"It does not seem to me," there was quiet decision in Cynthia's voice, "as if anything could help but hand-to-hand sympathy and good-will and getting close to people."

"Like givin' away books an' pictures an' dolls an' candy an' woolly lambs an' tin horses an' all the truck back there in the basket?" The old woman pointed over her shoulder. "I don't see how you're goin' to reckon up this sort o' thing in campaign expenses."

"I shan't put them in with campaign expenses. They're individual."

"Let's hope the law will see it that way. There's one hole it seems to me we can crawl

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through. The law'll have to make allowance for the different way women do things. You don't suppose, do you, that men set down every cigar they hand out or every drink they treat to? Not on your life," she added contemptuously. "Why, ain't a doll or candy or a woolly sheep or a monkey on a stick or—"

"Just as lawful as spending money," laughed Cynthia, "on clothes pins to clinch our literature together!"

"Yes." Jane Hagner spoke complacently. "I call that a rather neat idea of mine. There ain't a woman nowhere but will go out an' pick up a clothes pin. The probability is that she'll save anything we nail into it. We're one ahead on men's ideas there anyway."

That evening, while they rested in the shabby rotunda of a village hotel, Debonair rushed in excitedly.

"Mother, have you been forking out silver dollars to a procession of kids who marched past carrying a banner and making speeches to you?"

"Yes, why?"

"Why? Because they take you for a bloated bondholder and the easiest thing in sight. How many of them came through?"

"Twelve or fourteen, I guess."

"There's just one bona-fide banner carrier."

"Nonsense, I spoke to all of them. The speech they made was much the same, about

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how their fathers and mothers stood for me and were going to vote the Republican ticket. I had a long talk with the last one, a sweet, brown-eyed little chap, who helps to support his mother. He has a blind sister and—"

"How much did you give *him*?"

"Why, Deb, I gave him five dollars. He was perfectly adorable and he had such grit— I made him promise not to tell the others. He—"

"Well, he did. There's thirty of them out in the barn now trying to make up stories that will go the brown-eyed mutt one better." Deb-onair dropped upon a lounge with a shout of laughter.

"What are you talking about?" asked his mother sharply.

The boy turned to Mrs. Hagner, who had unpacked her knitting.

"Aren't you supposed to be mother's guardian as well as her campaign manager?" he asked.

"Supposed is good." Jane Hagner's eyes twinkled.

"I had a hunch that something was wrong. I heard these little rats talking while I wrote a letter. I followed them out. They would be marching yet if I hadn't broken up the combination. I caught one as he stopped and hollered, 'Three cheers for Cynthia Pike,' then I trailed him to the alley. They had one banner. You

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saw it, it had your picture on it and 'Vote for Cynthia Pike.' Each one took his turn at marching through, speaking his little piece, and getting his dollar. Another one stood at the door waiting his turn. What are you going to do about it, Mother?"

"I don't know, Sonnie," she answered, in an unsteady voice. "When you were twelve you would have stepped into that procession yourself. The only thing to do is head off the others who had not come in, give each one a dollar, then, Deb, say, don't set down that item with campaign expenses."

CHAPTER XI

A DESERTER FROM THE CAUSE

"SHE'S no up yet," answered Teenie.
"What's mair, I'll no' wauk her!"

"I must see Mrs. Pike at once," said Jane Hagner impatiently.

Teenie blocked the door and stared at the old woman with grim determination. The rain pelted under the piazza roof and struck in her face like a cloud of spray.

"Ye can come in," she said grudgingly, "but I'll no wauk her for you nor onybody else. She's half dead for want o' sleep."

"I've got to see her." There was a dogged tone in Mrs. Hagner's voice. "There's news—"

"News'll keep."

"This won't. Where's Debonair?"

"He's at Lawton. He gaed there yesterday an' didna come back last nicht."

"Well, I've got to speak to Mrs. Pike."

"Ye can come in if ye're set on it." There was scant hospitality in the Scotchwoman's voice. "I'll keek in an' see if she's awake. If no', she sleeps till ten o'clock."

"Well, do that."

Mrs. Hagner thrust her dripping umbrella into the hall-stand and listened to the deliberate tread of the servant while she climbed the stair. She could hear her mutter angrily to herself. It seemed impossible to gain Teenie's sympathy for the suffrage situation. Even when the future looked luminous for the party, she refused stubbornly to enthuse or speak one word of approval.

"She's awake. Ye're to come up." The servant glanced over the railing with reluctant courtesy at Mrs. Hagner.

The visitor dropped her wet rubbers and climbed the stairs quickly.

"You look like a picture," she cried as she entered the chamber.

Cynthia was sitting up in bed with her tumbled hair tucked inside a lace cap and a fascinating little jacket as pink as her cheeks thrown over her shoulders.

She laughed. "You look like a picture too, a picture of despair. What's happened?" she laughed. "Has a cyclone carried away my banners again?"

"No."

The old woman fumbled in a leather bag, then handed her the morning paper.

"Has another editor knifed me?"

"No." Jane Hagner unfolded the paper with slow deliberation. "No, read this!"

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Cynthia leaned forward till the light fell across the page. She read aloud.

"BURKE BEVERLY, DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE FOR CONGRESS, MARRIED OLYMPIA SMYTHE, SECRETARY OF THE SUFFRAGE LEAGUE. A WEDDING WHICH MAY ADD COMPLICATIONS TO MRS. PIKE'S CAMPAIGN."

Cynthia lifted her eyes and gazed perplexedly at the woman beside her.

"I had not supposed that any decent woman would marry Beverly."

"Them's the identical words Reuben spoke. I was fryin' doughnuts an' he was readin' the paper while he set by the kitchen stove. When he come to this I dropped my fork in the skillet. The grease flew, I tell you."

"Didn't she tell any one?" asked Cynthia perplexedly. "She never resigned from the League, did she?"

"No, it's the deepest kind o' a plot."

"A woman would never marry a man like that simply to plot."

"Olympia Smythe would. What's breakin' me up is,—I did it."

"Did what?"

"Drove her to it. Don't you remember that afternoon, when Ellen Schaffer said I'd make Olympia turn round an' do something mean 'cause she's so 'vengeful. As like as not I've

defeated you an' knocked the underpinnin' from suffrage for—well, forever; who knows!"

"Jane Hagner," Cynthia reached out to take the old woman's hand between her own, "remember this: if we lose, I've had enough fun out of the campaign for anything I've spent. Half the time I'm in two minds about it. One day I'm scared to death that we may pull it off; the next, I am crazy to go. It might be fun; then again, it mightn't."

"I'm thankful you feel that way." Mrs. Hagner drew a breath of relief. "Only I've got to square myself with more'n you. The League will blame it all on me, see if they don't."

"Perhaps I had better let somebody run in my place," suggested Cynthia.

"Lord, no!" cried Jane Hagner. "For one thing that wouldn't be constitutional now you're nominated. Besides, there ain't a coward in the whole League. We're goin' to fight. It's neck or nothin', an' the devil take the hindmost, from now on."

CHAPTER XII

POLITICAL LANES AND ALLEYS

BURKE BEVERLY was a type of politician found not infrequently in the Southwest as well as elsewhere in America. He had started out in life utterly destitute of decent breeding and with scarcely a shred of education. His blatant iteration that he was self-made only drew attention to the fact that the workmanship was exceedingly shoddy.

You have seen a man of his breed in the mob, which surrounds a public speaker. Finding himself on the fringe of the crowd, he sets out to elbow his way to the front. He squeezes through space no decent citizen would usurp, treads on a foot here and there, brushes aside an arm which would impede his progress, or turns upon the man who opposes him, with a vicious snarl and oath. The timid and weak are pushed aside by sheer brutality till he reaches the front of the platform and stands shoulder to shoulder with men who have won their place by long, patient waiting. If he leaves scowls, bitter words, curses and bruises along the trail, he does not give them a second

thought, because his nature has grown callous to public sentiment.

During ten years Beverly had been elbowing his way to the front in Oklahoma, surrounding himself by henchmen who obeyed his every order because of his sheer brute strength and an egotism grown drunk from power and the shouts of a hoodlum multitude.

"He is capable," said a paper which opposed him bitterly, "of riding rough-shod over the Constitution itself and then, malefactor as he is, of posing as the unspotted lily."

Outwardly he looked the polished citizen of the world, but the veneer of education had done little to civilize him. He realized the antagonism of the district and set to win the nomination in a subtle fashion.

His power was not realized until the returns declared him the Democratic nominee. When the decent element tried to wrest the nomination from him with a cry of fraud, it was a hopeless task.

His band-wagon sagged with crooks, malcontents and would-be office holders. Even the State looked on aghast. It realized the pressing need of the country for important legislation and viewed the situation with a solemnity new to a community which had long taken its politics as it had staked out claims on Run Day, with a dramatic haste which sometimes was suicidal.

In September, the tenth district faced the

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problem of choosing between a woman unacquainted with the first principles of statesmanship and a man it scorned and repudiated. Into this political snarl the news of Beverly's wedding smashed like a bomb five weeks before election day. The Smythe family was of some consequence in town. One of them owned a morning paper, which began to predict an overwhelming defeat for the Republican candidate, and day after day a procession of deserters from the Pike camp wended its way to Democratic headquarters.

Olympia, gorgeous in her wedding finery and trampling the cause of suffrage under foot, stumped the district with her husband. His prize-ring language made the riff-raff shout with delight and the verbiage of her speeches tickled their ears. In October, Beverly began to claim everything in sight. Sporadic attempts were made to prove old charges of graft against him but they failed. He held his supporters in leash like a pack of hounds, sometimes by brute force, occasionally by the smell of meat. In no State in the Union could have been found a stranger rabble than his followers, an unwashed, illiterate, restless horde, descended from wild adventurers, Indians, gamesters, cattle-thieves, reckless cowpunchers, negroes, and the human waste of a nation. A few honest men stuck to him, hoping by some miracle to save the skin of the party.

One night Cynthia Pike saw herself cartooned, falling from a collapsed balloon and clutching desperately at a wrecked parachute. The faces of Olympia and her husband stood out distinctly from a crowd below who stared skyward in fiendish delight. She took one glance at the paper, then tossed it on the floor.

That night a council of war was held at her home. Men and women went away moody and discouraged, some of them ready to desert the cause. After the last good-night was spoken, Cynthia dropped into a low chair beside the fire and stared at the red glow of the coals. A jaded look crept into her eyes, thin lines of worry crept over her forehead and her shoulders drooped listlessly. She had twisted her hair into a loose knot as if life were too hurried to make the best of herself. Debonair crossed the room, picked up the evening paper, then he looked anxiously at his mother.

"You ought to be in bed, you're tired to death," said the boy.

"I am—tired to death—tired of living," she confessed.

"It's my fault. I ought to be kicked around a ten-acre lot."

"You? Why?" Cynthia looked up perplexedly.

"You would never have gone in for this blamed tomfoolery if it hadn't been for me."

"You are not to blame, Sonnie."

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"Yes, I am," he insisted savagely. "That day when I blew in, the day I found Auntie Schaffer brow-beating you to this, I put in my oar, and—"

"Debonair, I ought to have had backbone enough to say, 'No.'"

"You gave in for me. Don't you remember? I told Auntie Schaffer I could make you do anything I wished. I said it would be no end of a lark, remember; you listened to me."

"Nonsense, Debby, I was as restless then and as eager as you were. If I hadn't gone into politics, I might have taken to something else, something worse."

"What—for instance?"

"I can't tell, Sonnie," she answered wearily. "There are so many fool allurements in this world."

Debonair tossed the paper into the fire and pushed it back in the grate with the poker. A thin tongue of flame touched one corner, then it flared suddenly into a blaze.

"I had not read the paper, Deb," said his mother.

"It's just as well you hadn't. I'd like to start out and cudgel the whole damned mob that's hooting at you. I don't mind how they blackguard your little fool party, but when they turn around and throw mud at you and make a butt of you in their groggy old cartoons and set the scum at your heels—"

The boy dropped the poker with a clatter on the hearth, then turned and went tramping about the room with his hands in his pockets and a scowl upon his face.

"When I watch folks climb up on Beverly's band-wagon," he broke out impetuously, "that you've fed and toted round and done all sorts of things for, oh, it makes me sick!"

"Sonnie." Mrs. Pike rose and crossed the room swiftly to where the boy stood leaning against the piano. She put her arms about him and laid his head upon her shoulder.

"You don't know how you have put heart into me, Deb. I feel as if a man had taken my part. Just as if my—" She hesitated when the boy looked suddenly into her eyes; she did not finish the sentence. She had been about to say, "my husband," and she knew it was a lie. "I've seen how things were going before anybody guessed it. I realized what a fool I am and what an idiotic thing it was for a woman, at least for a woman who knows as little about the world as I do, to run my head into a noose like this. A woman has no business to touch politics. They drag her into places that a decent man would hate. Don't you suppose I am learning? Don't I know the pledges they want me to take, and the people they would have me kow-tow to? Haven't they showed me the underhand, dirty lanes and alleys which have to be dodged through? The papers are right.

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They say we women are running a pink-tea campaign, and that men are crowding in now, to show us the ropes! You don't feel proud of yourself, inside the ropes."

"Mother!" cried the boy explosively.

"I don't believe it is going to smirch me, only for Heaven's sake, Debonair, whatever you do, when you are a man, let politics alone. Vote, I want you to vote, for the best man on the ticket, and for the decentest side of things, but don't go into politics."

"What are you going to do?" asked the lad hesitatingly.

"Simply stay in the race, if I don't have more than ten followers. We have a few more than that but they're dropping away every day. John Warner begins tomorrow to take care of my campaign. I don't believe he would set the prairie on fire, only he's an honest man and each woman in the League will take his advice. It's what we ought to have done long ago. Reuben Hagner said tonight: 'You women have been running around in a circle, like hens, and driven things to the demnition bow-wows.'"

Cynthia smiled grimly. "The trouble with women is they are contrary."

"I wish," Debonair stared at her with a scowling brow. "I wish, Mother, you could pull out and let us both get away from this blasted country."

"So do I, Sonnie," she took his face between

her hands and kissed him. "Only I can't. I'm not a quitter. Neither are you. As Warner said, 'You were nominated in a perfectly constitutional fashion. You've got to sit out the game. We men will stand by you till the last gun's fired.' "

"All right," the boy spoke doggedly. "There's nothing to do then but work and hope."

"Debonair." His mother's face was grave. "I want to start on a trip tomorrow morning."

"Where?"

"I can't tell you."

"Who are you going to see?"

"I can't tell you that either. It may turn out a perfectly idiotic errand. While I sat here staring into the fire, I thought of some one who can help us, perhaps."

"Who?" persisted the boy curiously.

"Nobody, you know, Sonnie. I'll take you and Jane Hagner along. You're the only people I shall tell about it."

"Hang on to Mrs. Hagner, Mother. The first time I saw her, I thought she was nutty, but she's an old brick."

"She isn't nutty. She knows more than the whole Suffrage League rolled into one. Now, son, it's bedtime. Before you go upstairs, call Michael. Tell him I want the car in front of the door at eight o'clock, no matter what the weather is. There's a long ride ahead of us to morrow."

CHAPTER XIII

SHAMELESS AND HIS MASTER

“WHERE are we bound for, Mother?” asked Debonair, as he climbed into the car next morning.

“That’s a secret.” Cynthia laughed.

“I don’t see why we should start so early.” There was a jaded look in the lad’s eyes. “We must be going a deuce of a journey. Whew! it’s cold.”

He turned up the collar of his overcoat and huddled close to the big chauffeur.

“Don’t you know, Michael, where we’re going?” he persisted.

The good-natured Irishman shook his head.

“A nice pair of sphinxes you are. All right, let her skip. I’ll tie myself up in a knot and have my beauty sleep out.”

“Do!” advised his mother.

“You won’t tell us then where we’re bound for? Don’t you know, Mrs. Hagner?”

The old lady in the back seat beside Cynthia clapped him on the shoulder.

“You lazy, young good-for-nothing, do you mean to say you’re just up? I reckon your mother or Teenie gave you breakfast in bed.”

"No such luck," grumbled Debonair. "Tee-nie worked the hook on me this morning. I've been up for an hour."

"An hour! If I had the bringin' up of you, I'd have had you out of bed three hours ago, choppin' wood or mowin' the lawn. That's what you need to stir your blood an'—"

"Don't scrap," laughed Cynthia.

"We're not scrappin'. I'm fond of that boy." Mrs. Hagner's voice dropped to a whisper. "Only it will be the ruination of him if you don't set him to work. He'll grow up as useless as a colt that ain't broke to harness when its grass-fed days are over."

"I can't spare him now." There was a weary tone in Cynthia's voice. "He's an un-failing bracer when the bottom drops out of things."

"I reckon you're right," acquiesced the old woman, "only don't let him go too long. My! what a mornin' this is!"

Oklahoma offers no such days as during the late Fall when an early frost drops over the undulating prairies like a filmy sheet of white tulle. Warm blotches of brown blazed in the walnut trees and late wild flowers gleamed in weedy corners of the roadside. The radiance of the sky and the crispness of the air was intoxication.

Cynthia lay back and drank in the exuberance of it. The race of an unleashed motor over a

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country road had not lost its fascination for her, although other things which wealth could buy were growing stale and uninteresting. The red dust had been laid by rain and a sharp frost. The world had never seemed so big and beautiful before. While she listened to Debonair's chatter, to Michael's deep-chested laugh and Jane Hagner's quaint philosophy, she forgot worries, which during a wakeful night had loomed up before her like problems.

Debonair leaned forward eagerly when Michael leaped out to let down two wide panels in a barbed-wire fence.

"Is this where we turn in?" he asked.

"Yes," said his mother.

"I don't see anything ahead but prairie."

"There's a house in a hollow by the river," explained Michael.

"Whose house?"

"That's my secret," his mother laughed.

"Don't you know where we're going, Mrs. Hagner?"

"I don't. What's more, I don't care. I'm askin' no questions. I'm happy just to be out such a mornin'. I've drove through this part of the country before but never come in at that gate."

"Mother, you're not taking us to an insane asylum?"

"Mercy, no, not yet."

They followed a road which was merely a

wheel-crushed path across the pasture, occasionally climbing the summit of a gentle rise. Here and there from the withered grass or in a field where dry cotton stalks rustled, a covey of prairie chickens soared with a quick whir, to drop out of sight again as quickly as they had risen. The road led down to a stream, which wound tortuously through the bottom of the range. The water looked thick and tawny. Here and there the creek was so narrow that a tall man might have leaped across it, then it turned a sharp curve and widened out into a pool so quiet that one could hardly find a ripple. Along the bank, willows and cottonwood and walnuts grew like trees fringing an avenue. Flurries of dead leaves drifted into sodden heaps against the clay banks. Where the trees were protected from frost, goldenrod and misty tangles of purple asters lit up the dun-colored landscape and red-winged blackbirds made flashes of color among the underbrush.

"I suppose that's the place we're bound for," cried Debonair as he leaned eagerly forward.

From the top of a rise they looked down upon a house set in a garden with boxwood hedges. Clumps of shrubbery glowed like a blur, red or gold or glossy evergreen. Tall poplars, a wide-spreading magnolia and one giant oak with leaves which had turned ruddy brown, stood at the farther end of the garden. The house was a

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straggling, one-storied bungalow with a red-tiled roof and walls that gleamed as white as snow.

"This beats me," exclaimed Jane Hagner, "Who'd have dreamed of findin' a place like this tucked away in a loop o' the creek. Who lives here?"

"William Prince of Orange McCroy," answered Cynthia.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," cried Debonair. "You said we weren't headed for a lunatic asylum. There's more loose pulleys in McCroy's mental works than—"

"That's where you're wrong!" remonstrated Jane Hagner. "William Prince of Orange ain't half as dippy as he looks. He's queer as all git out, only he's nobody's fool. Why on earth do you want to see him?" She turned curiously to Cynthia. "He's—"

"Hush," whispered Cynthia, "here is McCroy now."

A man came hurrying to meet them under a pergola, which stretched from a green lawn to the gate. The grape-vines that matted the cross-beams were covered with withering leaves, and cast a flicker of shadows across his face. When he flung the gate open his face beamed with hospitality and delight. Cynthia tossed back her veil and turned a radiant smile upon him. The sun discovered flecks of red gold in the tendrils of hair, which blew about her

cheeks, her face was full of warmth and color and the pure delight of living. McCroy took the hand she offered, and gazed at her with the guileless admiration she had found in his face while he sat beside her in the moonlight.

"When did you people get acquainted?" A wrinkle of perplexity crept into Jane Hagner's face.

"On nomination day," answered Cynthia. "Mr. McCroy did a right chivalrous thing that night; he came to congratulate me."

"He did?" Mrs. Hagner turned to him quickly. "You'd ought to be gittin' a congratulation speech down pat by this time."

"That's what I told Mrs. Pike." A vague smile crossed the man's face.

"Are we going in here, Mother?" asked Deb-onair.

"I should like to, if Mr. McCroy invites us."

"It will be the proudest moment of my life." The man threw the gate wide open.

"Would you mind?" Cynthia spoke with slow hesitation while she glanced at Jane Hagner. "Would you mind if I talked with Mr. McCroy alone for a few minutes? Afterwards I want you to advise with us about something."

"Land sakes! no. I'll get out and walk t^h garden. I want to stretch my legs. W^h you're ready for me, holler. Are you c^o along, Deb?"

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"No, I'll lie here on the back seat and nap. I'm dead for want of sleep."

Cynthia followed McCroy up the pergola walk. It was paved with flat stones between which the grass sprouted in stiff, green tufts. They paused near a stone bench on the lawn where a quiet pool lay inside a cement basin. Lily leaves floating in its surface were touched by frost and cat tails were bursting into silky white fluff.

"This place must be wonderful in summer," said Cynthia.

"It is," the man spoke eagerly. "It rained hard last month, you remember, then a second bloom came after the sun had nearly scorched the world to death. Sometimes, I wonder if the Garden of Eden compared with this."

"Why do you hide it away?" asked Cynthia. "No one can find it unless they come searching."

"It's like a room or a person or anything else you love so much that you don't want to share it with all the world."

"I never thought of that before." A vision of her Lawton Street home flashed before Cynthia's eyes like a tawdry picture set in a gaudy frame. The day she realized that rolls of yellow-backed paper seemed exhaustless as water in a deep well. She had taken a house, the finest, largest and most imposing which had been offered, then began to furnish it in feverish haste,

filling it to suffocation with the most expensive furniture, pictures, draperies and bric-a-brac she could find. She had wandered through it in silent delight, then thrown it open, as one does a museum, to be gazed at by admiring crowds from morning till night. Recently, she could not tell why, it had failed to satisfy her. There had been moments when it had seemed more unhomelike than the ugly little bungalow at Mullein.

While she followed McCroy about the quiet garden, with its fading memory of what a garden it had been and would be again, she realized the difference between her snug, close-shaven lawn with its concrete coping, gaudy flower beds, clumps of expensive shrubs and grotesque statuary. It was as unhomelike a garden as a city park.

"You're right," she confessed slowly. "I never understood what a home and a garden might be like. Why did you want to exchange this for Washington?"

"I told you there were things I wanted to do."

"I remember, the baby alligators. Where do you keep them?" She lifted her skirts and glanced around timidly. The reptiles might be creeping through the grass at her feet.

McCroy broke the head from a cat tail and began to pick off its silky fluff, which sifted through his fingers and blew away on the wind.

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"Something happened a few days ago." A horror-stricken look crept into his eyes. "Something I can never forget. Valentine, whom we petted for years,—he was almost patriarchal,—ate Pigmy."

"I don't understand."

"Valentine was my first alligator. I brought him from Florida in my pocket. He followed me about like a dog. He knew his name, he came when I called him. To think of him turning cannibal!"

"Cannibal!" repeated Cynthia curiously.

"One day Pigmy strayed in here, starved and forlorn. We adopted him, he was such an interesting scrap of a—"

"Yes, but what was Pigmy?"

"A little colored boy."

"Horrors!" The woman glanced about with shuddering terror at the sun-drenched garden, into the pool beside her, through a tangle of shrubbery, and over the boxwood hedges. "I believe I would rather go into the house," she confessed. "I have a perfect terror of alligators."

"There is not an alligator within a hundred miles," said McCroy quietly. "I poisoned them all, even a new brood no bigger than chameleons. I had never allowed before that there was a yellow streak in alligators. Something like that might have happened again."

"Certainly."

"Shamus and I—"

The woman smiled. "I had forgotten Shamus, how is he?"

"I had forgotten him too." A gleam of fright crept into the man's face. "Oh—"

Cynthia jumped to her feet as a woman's shriek pealed through the still garden.

"What has happened?" She clutched at McCroy's arm. "It was Mrs. Hagner who screamed. Are you certain there are no alligators?"

"There is not an alligator on the place. It is Shamus. When you arrived he was having a turn. I forgot about him."

McCroy leaped across boxwood hedges and flower beds, which lay between him and the house. Cynthia followed over the grassy paths. Around the corner of the house appeared Jane Hagner, flushed and panting for breath, racing as if her life were in danger. At her heels came a tall, gaunt figure. Each time he planted his crutches in the garden path he swung out one leg like a pendulum and shouted in a hoarse voice:

" 'Tis grog, only grog,
Is his rudder, his compass, his cable,
his log,
The sailor's sheet iron is grog."

"Don't come this way, Cynthia Pike," gasped Mrs. Hagner. "Head for the gate. Call Mi-

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chael. For the love of Heaven, hurry. There's an old one-legged lunatic after me. Run, I say."

Cynthia did not move. She waited till the woman reached her, then laid her hands on her shoulders and pushed her down on a bench.

"Listen," she cried. "Be quiet. You'll have an apoplexy if you don't. There's nothing to worry about now. It's Shamus. McCroy has caught him. He had a turn."

"A fit?" asked the old woman with a shudder.

"No, he's drunk. McCroy is quieting him."

"Quieting him," repeated Jane Hagner. "Do you call that quiet?"

Cynthia began to laugh nervously while she watched McCroy. He took the sailor's crutches away from him. Shamus hopped about like a besotted toad and began again to sing:

"But the standing toast that pleased
me most

Was the wind that blows, the ship that
goes

And the lass that loves a sailor."

"He ought to be clapped in jail and gagged for his blasphemous songs," cried Jane Hagner. "Do you mean to say McCroy gives house room to an abandoned old ruffian like that?"

"Shamus is his right-hand man."

"A fine right hand he is with a left leg gone."

"Where did you find him?" asked Cynthia.

"Find him! Bless my soul, he found me. When you said you wanted a quiet talk with William Prince of Orange McCroy," began the old woman caustically, "it was up to me to take myself out of the way. After wanderin' round the garden for a spell, I set down on a bench by the smoke tree there. I felt jounced an' sleepy after our long ride. I'd dropped off in a snooze, I reckon, when I was waked by that hoary old sinner. He'd been layin' in a hammock close by an' I'd never see'd him. The first thing I knew he rose up wavin' a crutch in the air, whistlin' through his teeth, cavortin' round on one foot an' shoutin' for grog."

"Then?" asked Cynthia in an agony of laughter.

"Then—why, I legged it out o' there as fast as I could come. Let's go home."

"No, you may go out there to the car if you feel safer, but I want to talk to Mr. McCroy. Stay with me. In fact, I believe you ought to be here."

"For what?"

"I'm going to ask him to help us through our campaign."

The old woman fumbled in her pocket until she found her spectacles. She adjusted them deliberately upon her nose, then stared at Cynthia as if scanning her face for a symptom of weak mindedness, which was not visible to the naked eye.

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"Turn that wobble-headed absurdity loose on the war-path for—us! My dear, let's sell our chances for what they will bring as junk and quit."

"You don't suppose I can quit now!" asked Cynthia steadily. "I've just begun to get fightin' mad. I don't know why—" She paused and her face flushed hotly. "I feel as if McCroy might help to pull us out of the hole."

"Good Lord, how!"

"I have not decided yet. I mean to lay the whole situation before him and ask him how."

"And the one-legged toper? Are you plan-nin' to take him along as a side show or some-thin' of that sort?"

"I hadn't thought so far ahead as that yet." Cynthia laughed idly. "Still he is a picturesque possibility. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE DROPPED LEAF IN A LIFE

MCCROY rose from his knees with a steaming coffee-pot in one hand. The fire in the kitchen had gone out. It was easier, he explained, to light a wood fire in the living room than to start one in the stove. Cynthia watched while he hung a kettle over the blaze and measured out spoonfuls of coffee with slow deliberation. When the water bubbled, he filled the pot and set it on the red embers to boil. It began to steam delectably. He lifted it and stuffed the nozzle with a wad of tissue paper.

"I suppose you would rather have had tea?" He hesitated while his eyes circled his guests.

"Not for me," answered Jane Hagner promptly. "Tea's poor slop for full-grown people."

A smile flickered across the man's face.

"I imagined tea was feminine beyond all dispute."

"Well, it ain't," Jane Hagner shrugged her shoulders. "If you're plannin' to feed us, hurry up. I'm famished. I will say this for

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you," she added reluctantly, "you're the first man I ever saw make coffee that was fit to drink. It smells as good as my own."

"Thank you, ma'am. I *can* make good coffee."

"I've owned up to that but, for the land's sake! don't set it there to get cold an' sloppy. Put it back on the hob. I've no particular use for coffee unless it scalds my gullet the hull way down."

"Of course," he confessed, "it ought to be kept hot. I hope you will pardon me. I feel agitated, I have not had a lady visitor here since Bella Donna—"

"Who's Bella Donna?"

"Our washwoman."

"Don't Shameless wash for you?" demanded Mrs. Hagner.

"Shameless?" repeated McCroy. "Oh, yes, now I understand. Bella Donna comes here once in two months and—"

"Once—in—two—months?" Jane Hagner stared at him in horror. "You wash once in two months."

"Yes, I wish it were once a year. We have not clothes enough for that. I loathe wash day, and wet things flapping; they spoil the look of the garden."

"Good Lord, you are an argument against—" Jane Hagner regarded him severely.

"Against what?" he asked.

"Against what Olympia calls the eventual segregation of functions."

The man nodded absently.

"Olympia Smythe's got a high-flown theory about settin' men at housework and havin' women go out in the world to do men's work."

"Building bridges and quarrying or commanding a battleship and things like that?" asked McCroy.

"Exactly, buildin' bridges or quarryin' an' commandin' a battleship an' things like that." A gleam of malice danced in the old woman's eyes.

"I don't believe—" McCroy hesitated, "that her project would work out to advantage."

"Of course, it wouldn't work out at all. Any idiot knows that. Think of every man in the world transformed into an old Dog Tray, messin' round a kitchen or sewin' on buttons; of course it wouldn't work. For thousands of years we've been gettin' at the eternal fitness of things. A few crazy females ain't goin' to swing everything out of kilter, do you suppose?"

McCroy looked at her with a vague smile.

"Lead the way to the vittels," she commanded. "You were headin' that way when I broke in on you. I'll help you lay 'em out or cook 'em or do anything that's to be done. Five's some company, when as a rule there's nobody but Shameless an' you."

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"Shamus," corrected Cynthia.

"Shameless suits me." Jane Hagner's tone was conclusive.

"Shall I help?" asked Cynthia.

"You set the table. There seems to be dishes enough in that cupboard."

McCroy led the way to an out-door buttery beside the well.

"We cannot buy ice here," he explained, "so I invented a refrigerating appliance which—"

As Jane Hagner reached the back door the air was stirred by a wild tumult. It seemed as if a battering ram was being pounded against a wall. In perfect rhythm to each blow a stentorian voice sang:

"And when I die, don't bury me at all,
Just pickle my bones in alcohol.
Lay me away most carefully
Under a brandied cherry tree,
With a bottle of booze at my head and feet,
Then steal off home, and let me sleep."

"Mercy!" cried Jane Hagner grimly. "It's that lunatic Shameless, again. Has he broke loose?"

"No, I chained him to a box stall. He may smash the stall but every door in the barn is locked."

"Why don't you turn him adrift or shut him up somewhere—"

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"Shut up Shamus? Why he's the most lovable—"

"Lovable, it seems to me he's nearer bein' damnable."

"Don't judge Shamus till you see him. He may be all right before you leave. When he sings of dying he is nearly himself. He comes out of a turn as gentle as a sucking dove."

"You mean lamb, don't you?"

"Yes, lamb," assented McCroy gravely.

They sat down to a noble meal, noble in quantity and quality, but as queer and heterogeneous a mass of food as was ever collected upon one table. McCroy came in from the buttery time and again laden with sufficient food for a ravenous army. He stood prying tops from jars and sawing into cans until Jane Hagner stopped him.

"I'll take that can-opener away from you if you don't quit usin' it," she threatened. "You've turned out four jars of that patful grass stuff now. Don't ask me to eat it, it smells turned."

"It isn't turned," cried Debonair. "It's delicious. It isn't patful grass, it's *pâté de foie gras*."

"Patedefogra," mimicked the old woman. "What's the unholy stuff made of?"

"Goose livers, it's the finest French brand. I've just had a sandwich of it and—"

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"Everybody to their taste. Me for baked beans!"

Mrs. Hagner glanced out at the window, then turned eagerly to Cynthia.

"If Olympia should ever put through her fool 'eventual segregation of functions scheme,' the cannin' trusts of America would run every cook-stove out of existence. The canned stuff in that place he calls his buttery is stacked from floor to ceilin' an' them baked beans is the only common-sense vittels I found. He's got mushrooms and truffles an' canned blackbirds' tongues an' frogs' legs an' lambs' tails an' a mountain of stuff like the fool brown paste that Deb says costs three dollars a spoonful. There's a sample of the way a man house-keeps."

"It does knock suffragist theories on the head," laughed Cynthia.

"Land sakes! One generation of men's cooking would exterminate the hull human race."

Jane Hagner ordered Debonair and Michael to help her in the kitchen when the meal was at an end, then turned to McCroy with a plateful of food.

"Go and feed Shameless," she ordered.

"Shamus does not eat while he is having a turn."

"Make him eat. If you don't all that good stuff's wasted."

"McCroy's queer," remarked the old woman as she stood watching him slouch across the yard. "Queer as all git-out and yit my heart aches for him. A man like that alone in the world is as pitiful an object as a motherless babe."

"That's what I was thinking," murmured Cynthia, "only I hadn't put it into words."

"Stay here. When he comes back, if you still have the fool notion that he can help us, get down to business."

McCroy did not return immediately. Cynthia wandered about the vast living room.

"You're a snoop, Mother," cried Debonair when he found her kneeling before a book-case.

"It's pleasant snooping here," she confessed. "I have found the queerest books and the house is so interesting."

"It's queer, blamed queer, how that old crazy tick could have made a house look like this. What in thunder do you suppose he wants of a baby grand piano? Then see his pictures. Look at this picture, Mother."

Cynthia followed the boy across the room. He pointed to a narrow strip of a picture, a glimpse of blue lake set in a band of dull wood.

"That's the sort of a place I dream of," mused the boy. "There's no water like that in the Southwest, all we have is mud. This is so blue and still you wonder what it hides down in its icy depths. It's a crater lake on the top of

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an Oregon mountain, so the old chap told me. He said the water goes down to the very abdomen of the world. It's uncanny."

"Yes," assented his mother.

"Our house is different. It's—I don't know what—it's tinselly after this. These queer browns and dull greens with nothing to touch them up but the firelight and splashes of red in the navajo rugs just catch me."

"You're right, Sonnie. We furnished a house without knowing how."

"McCroy's like his house, or else his house is like him. We haven't had time to grow to look like our house."

"I hope we never will," gasped Cynthia. "Sonnie, here's McCroy. Leave us alone for a few minutes. I want to talk with him."

When the man entered she stood in a shadowy corner of the room, staring at a girl's picture set in a tiny frame of dull beaded gold. It was not beauty which held her, there was little in the face except the soft charm of youth and big dark wistful eyes. An eager impatience in the girl's gaze contrasted oddly with the low forehead, the weak, dimpled chin and the pouting, childish mouth.

"Who is she?" asked Cynthia eagerly, as the man crossed the room.

He did not answer for a moment. When she turned to look at him she caught a gleam of unhappiness in his face.

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"Forgive me," she cried. "I should not have asked such a question."

"Don't think that. Somehow—I haven't spoken her name aloud for years—she was my wife."

"Was?" repeated the woman. "Is it long—since she died?"

"She didn't die. I married her, more than twenty years ago. She found out that she didn't care for me, she was afraid of me. So—"

"Afraid of you?" repeated Cynthia. "How could she be?"

"I don't know," the man hesitated. "She acted like a bird you shut up in a cage that beats itself to death against the wires. There was only one thing for a decent man to do, open the door and set her free."

"Yes, but you? Did you wish to let her go?"

"Not at first. A man wants to hang on to a creature that flutters and struggles. It's human nature, I reckon." A pathetic smile flickered across his face. "Sometimes it seems to me I might have acted differently and yet I didn't know what else to do."

"Did she live here with you?" Cynthia glanced about the quiet room.

"No. I came here afterwards."

"Aren't you lonely sometimes?"

"Yes, sometimes. Come over by the fire, I have put on fresh logs."

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She followed him and dropped into the wicker chair he set before her.

He took a low stool beside the fire and turned his eyes on the spurts of flame which licked off the dry bark on the logs.

"I want to talk with you; we must start for home in an hour or two," said Cynthia. "Why do you suppose I came here?"

"I don't know." McCroy smiled. "I did not stop to think. It was gracious of you to remember I existed."

"That night, when you sat on the piazza and talked till morning, you said you would help me."

"Yes."

"I need help now. Hundreds of people, who were on my side a few weeks ago, are leaving me. They have gone over to Beverly. I don't care for myself," she began impetuously. "I feel as if I should hate Washington, only the party expects me to win. I have got to think of them. I wish I had not gone into it, it was perfectly insane. A man told me the other day I was merely nominated as a joke. You ought to have won at the primary."

"God forbid." A startled expression leaped into the man's eyes. "I am no more fit to go to Congress than you are. Sometimes one changes suddenly even in nerve and tissue. That sort of thing happens once in seven years, so they say. It came to me a while ago. I

understood suddenly what a failure and what a fool I have been."

"We have both been fools." Cynthia choked back a sob. "I don't see a way out anywhere."

"Can I help you?" he asked gently.

"Would you?"

"Yes."

The woman felt as if a burden had dropped from her shoulders. The man's quiet "yes" brought a sudden throb of hope. It meant more than if he had offered for her sake to swim the Atlantic between bladders.

"Do you want me in this confab?" asked Jane Hagner when she entered with a tray of dishes.

"Yes," cried Cynthia eagerly. "We are just getting down to business. You must tell Mr. McCroy exactly how we stand."

"We stand, just at present," began the old woman emphatically, "between the devil and the deep sea. The papers tell how things are going."

"I haven't read a paper for weeks."

"You haven't?" Jane Hagner looked incredulous.

"No."

"You ain't as much of a man as I'd been givin' you credit for. Don't ye take a mite of interest in our campaign? The Lord knows you've run often enough."

"It's odd," he confessed. "After I was defeated my feeling about politics burned down to

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dust and ashes. It grew so futile. Then I've been deep in anthropology."

"For the land's sake, what's that?"

"I can't explain in a few words. It's the study of a man as an animal."

"We're dealing at present with a man as an animal in our district. Maybe you can give us some points, with your headpiece and college learnin'—you've been to college, haven't you?"

McCroy nodded gravely.

"Well, it does seem, as Mrs. Pike suggested, that you might think up a scheme to help some way. Listen."

In a few, brief, picturesque sentences Jane Hagner sketched the situation between warring factions in the tenth district. The man sat watching her with thoughtful eyes. When she told of calumny and cartoons which left a sting, he rose to his feet.

"Do you mean to say they attacked a lady like that?"

"They certainly did."

"What can I do?"

"That's the absurd thing about it," acknowledged Cynthia. "I have not the farthest-off idea of what you can do unless," she added, with a laugh, "unless you 'sic' an alligator on Beverly."

McCroy did not smile.

"I believe," he answered slowly, "that if I

had won the nomination—and gone on the war-path, I could have been elected.”

“I can’t imagine you tomahawking around the country,” said Mrs. Hagner. “What would you have done?”

“I might have been tempted to tell all I know about Beverly.”

“For Heaven’s sake! If you’ve got anything up your sleeve about Burke Beverly that the rest of us don’t know, produce it, quick.”

“I cannot swear in court, I should want proofs first, but for six months I have suspected that Beverly was Jake Bisset.”

“Jake Bisset.”

Mrs. Hagner’s eyes were fixed intently upon McCroy and a perplexed frown knotted her face. She seemed to be searching in the nethermost lobe of her brain for something forgotten years ago.

“Jake Bisset?” she whispered.

“Don’t you remember, you were here through the Run, weren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t you remember Jake Bisset, the sooner?”

“Oh, my God!” the old woman clutched McCroy by the arm. “It can’t be. Why, don’t you remember? Bisset got as far as Alkali Creek, then they strung him up.”

“You forget an old sett who went to Ne-

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braska afterwards said he met Bisset there. He swore it was Bisset."

"I remember," breathed the woman.

"He always stuck to it that they lynched the wrong man. He was there that day at the Creek. When Bisset met him in Omaha he sneaked like a prairie dog."

"I remember now, as plain as day. Nothing come of it; later the old sett died."

"Yes."

"Bisset would never dare come back here, never!"

"I don't know about that," said McCroy gravely.

"Good Lord, if we could prove it! Oklahoma would see to it this time that he was hung by the neck till dead."

CHAPTER XV

FIGHTING TO THE LAST DITCH

JANE HAGNER stood at the back door whipping out a bunch of wet dish towels. A stretch of barren, drab-tinted garden lay behind her. A chill wind shrieked like a siren across the prairies and drove the bare branches of a lilac bush tapping against the kitchen window.

The old woman's face looked worn as from sleepless nights or tense anxiety. Her mouth was set in a straight line and her eyes were full of haggard misery. She handled the towels in a mechanical fashion like one whose mind is not set upon her work. When she heard a footstep on a brick path that led through the yard, she paused to look over her shoulder. A man turned the corner of the house. She dropped the towels in a basin and ran to meet him.

"William McCroy," she cried, "if you ain't a sight for sore eyes. I'd got to the point of prayin' for you to show up an' I'm not what would be called a prayin' woman. Where in time have you been?"

"In Nebraska."

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The man smiled down genially while he clasped the hand she had thrust into his.

"What luck did you have?"

"I come back with a story that will make a pariah of Beverly, for all time."

"What's a pariah?"

"Something so low down you hate to touch it with shod feet."

"He is Jake Bisset then."

"Yes."

"An' as bad's we thought him?"

"Bad," repeated the man slowly, "there's men breaking stone in jail yards who're cherubim compared with him."

Jane Hagner turned away, climbed the porch steps and dropped on the settle with a hopeless sag in her large body. McCroy stared at her curiously.

"I'm not too late?" he asked. "It wasn't as easy as I thought to get what proofs I needed. There are five days left before election; that ought to be time enough to swing public opinion round. When they hear my story, public opinion will swing."

"You're not too late in one way."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you just got to town?"

"Yes, I came through on a night train. I stepped off it twenty minutes ago. I came straight to you before going to Mrs. Pike's. Can you go there with me?"

"You hain't seen a mornin' paper?"

"No."

"We've got to wait an' see whether Cynthia Pike's goin' to live or not."

McCroy stepped so close to the low porch that he could stretch out his hand and lay it on the woman's arm. His eyes were on a level with hers.

"What do you mean? Is Mrs. Pike ill?"

"She was hurt."

"How!" the man's voice grew impatient.

"Last night she was speakin' from her automobile when somebody threw a stone at her. It struck behind the ear. The Doctor says you couldn't have picked out a tenderer place on her whole skull."

"Well?"

McCroy gripped the woman's arm when she paused. Her voice had grown husky with sobs.

"They took her to the hospital and operated right away. She ain't conscious yet. Till she is, the doctors won't say whether she'll live or not. I'm waitin' now for news. They're to 'phone just as soon as—"

The man's clutch loosened. He turned and sat down on the lowest step with his chin resting on his knees and his eyes bent on the dreary garden.

"For the land's sake, come into the house." Jane Hagner rose and opened the kitchen door. McCroy did not stir.

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"Do come in, won't you?" she begged.
"This ain't the kind o' mornin' to set on that cold step. There was a killin' frost through the night an' the wind goes straight through one."

McCroy rose to follow her. Suddenly he paused.

"May I call Shamus in? He's waiting for me at the corner."

"Of course. You hain't had breakfast, have you?"

"No, we are both going to a hotel in a few minutes. I can't eat—as for Shamus—"

"Come straight in, the two of you. It won't take ten minutes to get somethin' on the table."

McCroy stood looking at her doubtfully.

"I don't know if I can persuade Shamus to eat here or not. You see he—"

"Shucks! You tell him to come straight in. We'll let by-gones be by-gones. I'm too darned glad to see the two of you to take a bite out o' Shameless."

Shamus glanced timidly about the comfortable kitchen when McCroy opened the door and ushered him in. Jane Hagner held out her hand cordially.

"Come right in, Mr. Shameless. You'll have to excuse me, I never can get your name straight. Shameless whips out without thinkin'. Come in, you're welcome."

The man gazed at her from under his shaggy

eyebrows, then swung himself upon his crutches across the kitchen to a cushioned rocker which Mrs. Hagner set beside the stove.

"My soul," she thought, as she stood in the pantry slicing bread, "what good eyes the critter has. They look like a dog's."

She hovered about her guests with an air which was half distrait, half eager, bringing everything in the refrigerator to the table. She smiled as she watched Shamus carve a thick slice from a leg of cold lamb and eat it with pickled beets. McCroy drank two cups of coffee, rose from the table and pushed his chair away.

"Tell me everything," he demanded.

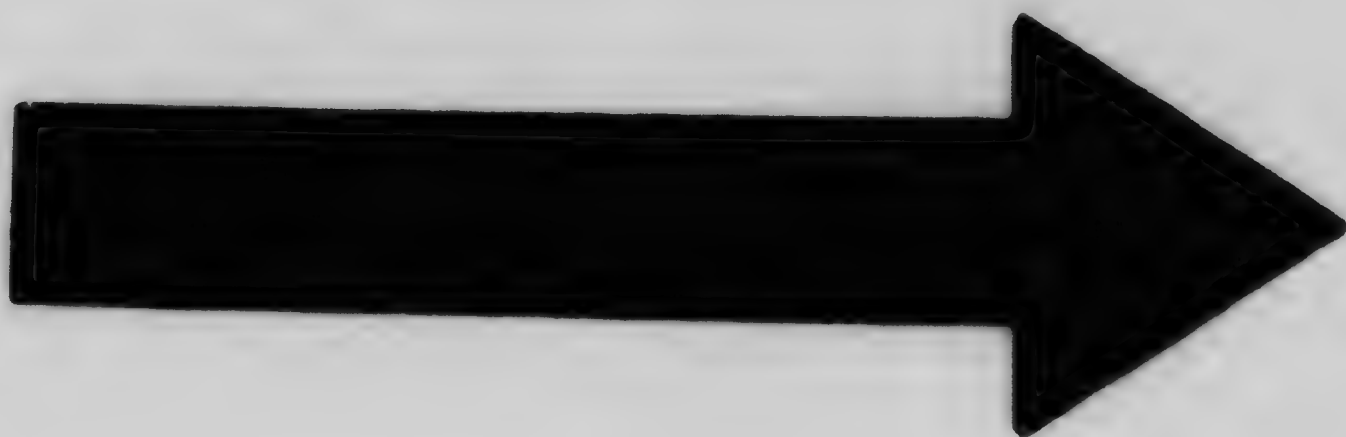
"About last night?"

"Yes."

"First of all, I'll have to go back or you won't understand. You left three weeks ago. A deal's happened since that time. We got your notes and telegram sayin' you'd struck Beverly's trail. We didn't write; we thought if you knew things was going from bad to worse—you might drop everything an' come home."

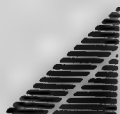
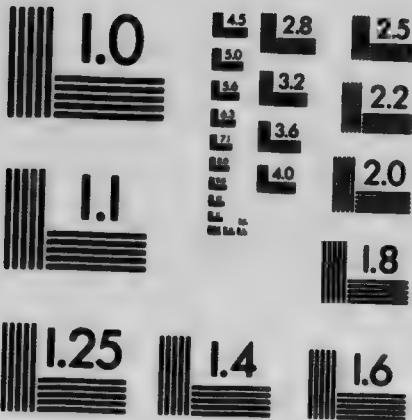
"I wouldn't have come home till I learned what I went after."

"John Warner tried to face Beverly with his record. All he did was to cry 'Liar.' We held proofs, so we thought, letters he'd wrote. Beverly twisted them around so they looked all right. We had witnesses, too, folks he'd broke



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or tried to hound out of the country, men who had helped him more 'n once an' been tramped under his feet when he got through with them. You know some of the people I mean?"

McCroy nodded.

"That crowd's about all we have left back of us today."

The old woman laughed bitterly.

"They ain't stickin' to us 'cause they believe we'll win. It seems to them the last show to get even with Beverly. John Warner's gone to pieces. He hain't a nerve left in him that ain't rickety, Mrs. Win Schaffer's been a regular bulwark, and her husband and Reub helped some. It needs a born fighter though, a fellow like what Jim Jeffries was once, to catch that mongrel by the scruff of his neck and break every bone in his body."

"What became of Judge Winter and the few decent men like him, who stood for you?"

"They've gone away back and set down," answered Jane Hagner grimly. "Two days ago they called a meetin', Cynthia and each one of us faced them. We listened to such a tongue lashin' as would take the conceit out o' the best of us. Before they washed their hands of political affairs and consigned the hull kit an' boodle of us to—well, to the devil—one man was plain enough to put it in them words—the old Adam come out in every mother's son of them, just as it did in the first old gentleman himself

when he nagged Eve and told her she'd played hob with the human race. I know we've been crazy idiots, only what's the use of throwin' that in our faces today?"

"It isn't any use," answered McCroy in a toneless voice.

"They talked of chivalry and standin' by us as long's there was hope. If there was a man down here with a spark of chivalry in him, do you suppose he'd stood by and see the way they've treated Cynthia Pike long before they started throwin' mud at her?"

"What did they do?"

"For one thing they raked up her past life, scaring up mean things about her when she lived on the God-forsaken edge of Mullein. They tried to have the law take hold of her because she'd been spendin' money free, her own money. That ruffian Beverly's stealin' what he spends, stealin' it, I say."

"If he was nothing worse than a thief, it would go well with him." McCroy spoke between gritted teeth.

"You're right there. The scurviest thing he's done though, to my mind, was when he brought in your name."

"My name?" asked McCroy in a dazed tone.

"Yes. They'd been spyin' on us, night an' day, so it seems, for the Lord knows how long. They knowed about Cynthia going to your place. They couldn't make a great deal out o' that, be-

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cause Debonair an' Michael and me were along. They said 'twas political plottin'. What they did make a slanderous story out o' was this,—they claimed you went to see her nomination night after everybody was gone an' stayed there till all hours in the mornin'."

The man's face went suddenly rigid and white. He clasped his hands together with a grip that left the nails bloodless.

"I did," he whispered. "We sat on the piazza and talked until it struck one."

"You never stepped into the house?"

"No."

"They're lyin'. There's nothing they ain't said!"

McCroy turned quickly away. His lips were white and his hands trembled. A gleam of something relentless and vengeful stole into his gentle eyes.

Jane Hagner laid her hand upon the door-knob and put her large body against the door.

"You're not goin' out o' this house with a mood like that on you. Shootin' Beverly would be the worst fool thing you could do; it wouldn't help us out o' this hole."

The man fumbled stupidly in his pockets.

"I never thought of shooting him," he confessed. "I haven't a pistol. I should not know how to shoot if I owned one. I am going to strangle him with my hands, with these hands."

He thrust them forward abruptly and Jane Hagner glanced at them with a shudder. She had never noticed his hands before; they looked strong and big and sinewy, the fingers jerked as if with an itch for murder.

"Sit down," commanded the old woman; "pull yourself together. You don't suppose I stirred you up—purposely—to do a thing like that? Oklahoma wouldn't stand for it today. When we swooped down here on the raw prairie an' faced all kinds o' cutthroats it was different. Times have changed. You can do a heap better work than murdering Beverly."

McCroy dropped his hat on the table and took a chair beside the stove. He looked up at Shamus and beckoned him to sit down. Jane Hagner had forgotten the dissolute sailor. He stood poised on the crutches, with his one leg swinging impatiently like a pointer's tail, awaiting the master's word to dash at its prey.

"Yes, sit down, Mr. Shameless." The old woman laughed nervously. "If the two of you git on the war-path bristled up and ready to fight as you look now, the Lord alone knows what might happen. My story ain't half told."

She dropped into a chair with a sigh of exhaustion.

"I'd got to the scandals they set flyin'. It's a heap easier killin' tarantulas than low-down stories, once they're started. That night as soon's I see'd the papers with the first hint

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about you I went up to Cynthia's. She was layin' on the sofa, a limp heap o' misery. Debonair set alongside o' her, white an' crushed. Teenie says when he read the paper he was goin' off, just as you were now, to fly at Beverly's throat. He saw the uselessness o' fightin' an' set to comfortin' his mother. When I walked in he come to me sobbin', an' yet Deb ain't no cry baby."

"What did she do?" asked McCroy.

"She, she didn't speak. Not a soul's got one word out o' her about the story. They say it keeps growin'. Heaven knows what it's come to now. The day they found you'd gone, they said you skipped to get out o' the mess."

"Oh, my God!" cried McCroy between his teeth—"is the whole country a nest of evil-minded scorpions?"

"Not quite. Folks come to the front an' took Cynthia's side. Only every one of them's had to have his say about what darn fools women are when they try to break into politics as if we didn't know it. They held the meetin' after that, the one I told you of, an' Cynthia got mad. She said she'd do her best to fight back if she fought alone. Last night we rode down an' got into a crowd. Folks were comin' out when we passed the theater. I don't know how they egged her on to it but she made a speech. I wish't you'd heard her. I never believed before she had it in her to talk the way she did. I kep'

watchin' the people. I could see them fairly turnin' over to her side. She didn't blackguard Beverly as he'd done her. She faced him, though, with every lie he'd told, except the one, where he brought your name in."

"Did she carry it alone?" whispered McCroy.

"My buttin' in wouldn't have helped. Folks come crowdin' up round our car till they stood on the steps. They cheered an' hollered an' clapped an' called her name. As soon's she knew she was beginnin' to draw them across the line, she quit politics and began to tell of the lonely, hard life she'd once faced, to' in' as women do in the country, away out on the edge of nowhere. She didn't make pledges nor swear by all that's great an' holy to get us new public buildin's or government jobs or easier freight rates or cheaper food or lower taxation. She told them if Congress would help she was goin' to try to have homes made better an' find bigger opportunities for the boys an' girls an' have life made different for women. You couldn't have heard a sound exceptin' the whirr o' a trolley over on Main Street or the wind brushin' through the trees an' her voice. Then—"

"Go ahead," cried McCroy impatiently.

"Then that stone came whizzin' through the air. It flew right past my face an' hit her behind the ear."

Mrs. Hagner turned to stare at Shamus. He

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had risen to his foot and bent forward on his crutches. The strange, deep-set, brown eyes watched her intently.

"Cynthia gave one sob, then fell forward into Deb's arms. He was on the front seat. The mob started to yell like a pack o' wild Comanches but they parted as orderly 's you please when Michael honked an' started the car for the hospital. All the way I could hear them behind us hollerin'."

"I'm going," cried McCroy. "Something's got to be done."

"Yes," the old woman laid her fingers on the door knob again. "You're right, somethin's got to be done. We women have made an unholy muddle o' things so far, but I believe I've got one good idea. It come to me through the night. I didn't do much sleepin', I laid with one ear open listenin' for the 'phone 'n' "

"What is your idea?"

"It's this. Last week Beverly called and Cynthia to meet him Monday night in a debate at the rink. You see how cocksure he feels. They begin votin' the next mornin' an' I reckon he's set his heart on carryin' the hull district. Nobody knows what can be done till news comes from the hospital. Even if Cynthia's goin' to live an' her name's left on the ticket, she can't go to no debate. Why don't you offer to take her place an'—"

"And lay low till that time, then come out an'

tell all I know!" cried the man. "Face him with the proofs and give my story to the audience!"

"Yes," whispered Jane Hagner, "that was my very plan."

A look of terror crept into his eyes.

"If I should tell it—all, they'd lynch him, right there, before our eyes."

"Let them. They stretched an innocent man's neck last time an' Beverly's kep' his mouth shet."

"God! there might be women and children in the place."

"It's a pretty good schémé to teach them how to clean up politics."

The man put on his hat. He was standing within the half-opened door when the 'phone began its imperious jangle. Jane Hagner dashed across the room and put the receiver to her ear. He wondered why she didn't use a footstool instead of standing laboriously on her tiptoes.

"Yes," she called. "Yes, Deb, this is Mrs. Hagner. I'm listenin', yes, I hear you, every word you're sayin'."

The wan, haggard lines smoothed out as if by magic from the old woman's tired face. The color flushed back into her cheeks, she smiled and the happiness of the world shone in her eyes.

"Yes, Sonnie," her voice shook with sobs.

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"Yes, we're all of us thankin' God. You just bet we are. Good-by, Boy."

The receiver dropped from her hand. It hung and turned slowly on its string.

"You understand," she cried with a laugh. "Yes, she's goin' to live. The doctor says in a few weeks she'll be on her feet. Now we can work." She turned quickly to the man who stood swinging his leg between the crutches. "As for you, you ridiculous old Shameless, go back an' finish your breakfast. Do you suppose I made that great pot o' my best coffee to be wasted!"

CHAPTER XVI

OLYMPIA'S HAND AT THE HELM

"THERE'S one thing left for you to do if you want to save your neck, and naturally you do." Olympia laughed harshly.

"Naturally, for your sake. I carry no insurance to speak of." Beverly's voice sounded brutal.

His wife glanced at him over her shoulder and laughed again. There was no mirth in her laugh, rather a cool, tantalizing insolence as if she found a certain pleasure in keeping him on the anxious seat.

It was Sunday morning. Beverly crumpled a newspaper into a wisp and tossed it on the floor. He had read a scathing editorial upon himself. Afterwards he found an item hinting that suspicion had fallen on "men higher up" for instigating the attack on Mrs. Pike. The lad who threw the stone was in jail. He was growing chicken-hearted and although names had not been mentioned a confession was expected which would interest the whole district and affect Tuesday's election. Beverly sat huddled in a velvet chair with one leg thrown awkwardly over the arm. His face knotted into an ugly

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scowl as he glanced at his wife. She wore a drab kimono and stood before the mirror, brushing her long, heavy coils of sand-colored hair. Beyond her own reflection in the mirror, she saw her husband's lowering face. Amid a tearing, mad anxiety which filled his mind the thought occurred to him how ugly his wife's hair was. He liked tints which flamed and rioted. Olympia's hair matched her dingy wrapper to a shade. He felt a snarling impatience because she did not realize how a toneless thing like that made her hideous.

"What's your latest scheme?" he demanded.

"When you ask me in a polite, gentlemanly way," she murmured, "I may tell you."

The man rose and began to tramp about the gaudy hotel chamber, for they were lodging next door to his campaign headquarters. While he scratched a match across the marble mantel, lit a cigar and began to smoke, his face contracted into an ugly frown. It was not a handsome face while in repose. Teeth like the tusks of a walrus contrasted oddly with a weak retreating chin and his iron-gray hair rose in a bristly pompadour from a square forehead. Beverly's eyes were his meanest features. Generally they were veiled by heavy, thick-fringed lids. When they opened wide and fixed their gaze upon a human being or any obstacle that blocked his path, they were the mean, pitiless eyes of a wolf. Although their

married life was scarcely beyond the veil of a honeymoon, Olympia had met that wolf gaze in her husband's eyes so often that she ceased to shudder. It would have killed the heart of any woman who had gone to the altar thrilled by love or dazzled by an illusion. There had not been the most pitiful ghost of an illusion in Olympia's romance. She had calculated with cold precision everything that the universe could bring her; a better name than the despised Bloodgood-Smythe, more wealth than had ever been at her disposal, social standing higher than her spinsterly place in the world, the possibility of sharing national honors, besides—revenge.

In exchange, she gave not only herself but a cohort of relatives whose roots burrowed in directions that could help Beverly. She had brain and education of a higher order than the man she married. During the few days before their hurried wedding she had viewed the opportunity offered her with passionless commercialism and come to the conclusion that it was a singular opportunity for team work. It appealed to her talents as well as her ambition. Consequently when she met an expression of ruthless appraisal or brute criticism in the eyes of her husband it merely hurt her vanity.

"If you see any way to save our faces," he said stolidly, "it's to your advantage as well as to mine to put me wise."

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Olympia did not answer. She was coiling a heavy braid of hair above her head and pinning it into place.

"Is that story about the boy being hired to throw the stone, true?" she asked after a pause.

"Certainly not."

"Personally, of course, you had nothing to do with it."

"Personally," repeated her husband with a sneer, "I didn't hire the job done. I haven't dropped to the level of stoning a woman."

"You merely provided against a contingency?"

"That's a damned clever way to put it," he laughed harshly.

"No personal accusation can be brought against you?"

"They can't bring my name into it."

Olympia stood adjusting the pins and combs in her hair with slow deliberation. Beverly stared out at the window and a gleam of relentless hate crossed his face. He bit his cigar savagely in two, tossed it on an ash tray and picked up an ivory paper knife which lay on the table. He stood fiddling with it between his fingers, then bent it suddenly. It was not a pliable thing and it snapped in two.

The woman was not looking at herself in the glass, her eyes were bent on her husband's reflection. She smiled derisively, as she heard the brittle snap of the ivory.

"If you could only break people like that," she suggested.

"Yes, damn it!" he snarled.

"Shall I tell you what I was thinking about?"

"What?"

"First of all, what would it cost to run out an extra of the *Journal*?"

"An extra about what?"

"I'll tell you later. If it cost a few hundred, would you stand for it?"

"Sure! What's a few hundred dollars thrown after a few thousand? Only one more item added to campaign expenses. They're beyond the limit now, by—I don't know how much!"

"I'll handle the affair; there's no need to put it on the expense account. Let me have the cold cash; checks are risky. I'll give Cousin Rob the story; it's a good enough one for an extra. He'll keep his own counsel."

"You bet your boots he'll keep his own counsel. His paper wasn't what would be called a paying proposition until my campaign began."

"You have had very good face value for all that has been spent on the *Journal*. You know that." Olympia's voice was scornful.

"Well, let it go at that. When do you plan to run out your extra?"

"This afternoon."

"A Sunday extra. That's a brand-new idea."

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"Because it is a brand-new idea it may clinch things."

"Or play hell with them?" suggested the man morosely.

"If you agree to keep your hands off and let me run it, you may still carry the election. If you don't, take the consequences." She shrugged her shoulders. "I hate Cynthia Pike as much as you do, perhaps a little more. If you had talked over the stone-throwing project with me I could have planned something better. Besides, I really couldn't see the need of it. Your election was as good as settled. If you had simply let things alone, they—"

"What story are you going to cook up for your infernal extra?" he interrupted.

"This: The shock of such an insinuation against you, that you were capable of instigating a personal attack on a woman, caused me to faint dead away. When I revived I demanded instant justice done you. I—I, myself—offer five hundred dollars to any one who will prove that there is not the slightest foundation for such a rumor."

"Good God, the reward would be claimed ten minutes after the paper got on the street."

"So much the better. Give it to the first man who will swear you out of it."

"Hell! I'm not made of money."

"Think up a better move, then, yourself."

She lifted the crumpled paper, smoothed it

and glanced over the accusing editorial. "That is half bluff," she mused; "still sometimes it's queer where lightning will strike."

"You know as well as I do that a reward of five hundred dollars isn't excuse for an extra."

Beverly's scowl carved ugly corrugations on his sullen face.

"I have another card to play. Tell McCroy you have changed your mind and will meet him tomorrow night in a debate."

"I'll see him in ——"

"All right." Olympia dropped into an arm chair beside the window, picked up a book and began to read. For several minutes there was not a sound in the room except a hiss of steam from the radiator.

"Debate with that spavined, driveling, half-baked imbecile!" Beverly jumped to his feet and began to stride the room nervously. "Not on your tintype!"

"If he is a congenital idiot, as people say, all the advantage is on your side." Olympia spoke in a low, uninterested voice. She did not even raise her eyes from the book. "What I had in mind was to get John Blair up here; he's a city editor on the *Journal*; I'll tell him what we want said. For fifty dollars he can write a speech which will be a knock-out blow."

"Another fifty?" Beverly wrinkled his forehead protestingly.

"Yes." His wife spoke sharply. "It's

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cheaper than dirt at fifty. He ought to get two hundred and fifty but he don't know it. What's the use of enlightening him? He's extraordinarily clever. I wish I could write as that fellow does!"

"He never struck me as anything wonderful."

"Your education was neglected." Olympia's voice rasped with irony. "If he writes the speech it will clinch things. You've got to put on the soft pedal in this and let him do it in his way."

"I'm dead against the whole plan," confessed Beverly sullenly.

"All right; think out something better."

Olympia took off her tawny-tinted wrapper and lifted a red gown from the wardrobe. She stood buttoning it slowly as her husband spoke.

"Have your own way," he mumbled.

"Hand out the fifty. I happen to know that Blair is hard up. He takes care of his sister and she's been ill. The cash will touch him. He will throw in an interview with me for the fifty. I'd advise you to keep out of the way; Blair has to be handled with gloves. Cousin Rob says he is afflicted with 'a rigid conscience.' If he guessed there was a scheme back of this he wouldn't touch it for five hundred!"

"Don't worry about me breaking in on your seance; the rigid conscience breed don't appeal to me."

"I hadn't imagined it would."

Beverly pulled a roll of bills from his vest pocket and tossed two of them on the table.

"You understand you get *my* services for nothing?" Olympia laughed coolly.

"Do I?" asked the husband. "What about that eight hundred dollar set of silver fox I got pulled in for last week?"

"That was stage costuming. You can't afford to take a shabbily dressed wife round the country campaigning."

"Don't throw anything like that in my face again. You and your buzzard relatives have dragged some shekels out of me during the past two months."

Olympia glanced up at him scornfully.

"I am willing to drop out of this conspiracy any minute you give me fair notice."

Her husband turned away and stared down into the sunbeaten street where groups of men and women sauntered past with prayer-books in their hands. The church bells were beginning to ring.

"Do any damned thing you want to," he said laconically as he tossed his hat on his head and turned to go. Suddenly he paused to glance back.

"Work out your ideas, put them through and I'll take some advice on this last frame-up of yours, but if," he looked at her with the wolf gleam in his eyes, "if it knocks me over the

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ropes, it won't be comfortable for you, my lady!"

A shiver ran through Olympia's body, still she lifted her eyes to his and laughed softly.

"You won't be knocked over the ropes."

CHAPTER XVII

JAKE BISSET, THE SOONER

THE night before election, Olympia, magnificently gowned, sat beside her husband on the stage of the Rink. Suppressed excitement lit a flame of crimson in her cheeks and glittered in her eyes. During weeks of travel through the district she had grown accustomed to the limelight, the riotous meetings, waving flags, to a clamor of bands, to roars of applause, sometimes to hisses. With her eyes fixed buoyantly upon the future, she had reveled in the mere emotionalism it aroused.

Defeat seemed improbable, almost impossible. The Sunday extra carried its eloquent message and the story of her outraged feelings through the district. As her husband led her out upon the thronged platform, she felt an exultant triumph. Men rose to make way for her till she reached the center of a group of politicians.

A sleepless night had bridged two days, into which was crowded a lifetime of intrigue, suspense and arduous work. This was the end of it, also the beginning of a career which filled her

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- dreams by day and night. Before twenty-four hours had passed, the people would have spoken and the latest forecast of figures would become a reality. She tried to remember a majority the *Journal* predicted for her husband, it had looked overwhelming. Her mind refused to work on mathematical tasks. She set the problem back in some nethermost corner of her mind and let her thoughts fly to Washington.

She saw herself transported to the halcyon city, swaying political situations or playing hostess among the big people of a nation. During a few years she had grown intellectually, and ahead of her loomed Heaven-born heights waiting to be scaled. She dreamed of gold rolling in, of power, of honor, even of the highest place in the nation. She knew her husband's limitations to a fraction but she had an extravagant faith in her own ability to mold him into a statesmanly figure.

The orchestra broke into a crash of rag-time music and she looked down at the sea of faces with suave exultation. They betokened the triumph of the future. The crowd packed the house to suffocation; men sat upon the edge of the gallery, perched on the window sills or hung like flies to the wall. The atmosphere was hot and murky. It lulled her brain to a comatose condition. She roused herself by an effort and sat up wide awake. Beverly had rehearsed John Blair's speech un'til he knew it by heart.

The young journalist penned it in a white heat of hurry, still it was a scholarly outburst and touches of Southwestern slang made it singularly vivid. He clothed Beverly's hackneyed pledges, arguments and egotisms in picturesque phrases.

Burke Beverly possessed the sonorous voice of an orator and a gift of sledging home with deadly earnestness the vilest brand of a lie. He could make an appeal seem potent where people were held spellbound by mere declamation rather than by spoken words. Olympia marveled at the stillness. Directly beneath them a girl struggled for a moment with a choking cough and a man at her side turned upon her with an impatient frown. She felt thankful that they had accepted John Blair's advice.

"Let Mrs. Pike slide," the newspaper man had pleaded, as Beverly stood out for a few sentences of wrathful vituperation. "The woman is lying helpless, she can't raise a voice in her own defense. If you attack her again you'll rouse sympathy for her at the last moment. That will tell against you when voters go to the booth. Besides you've said this sort of thing so often people are tired of listening to it. They want something different. I realize," he confessed, "she and the suffragists have run a crazy race, but it's over now. The Southwest isn't what might be called chivalrous, only it won't stand for knocking a woman all the

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time. I know from letters that come to our paper."

"All right," acceded Beverly glumly, "drop her."

In a few quick sentences Blair suggested the futility of a woman's place in public life. There was a skillful undertone of sympathy for Cynthia's defeat and a vague prophecy that the weaker sex might one day be competent to take its place in the councils of a nation.

"Only," he concluded, "during these strenuous days it requires the head and the brain of a strong man to mold the future of a young State."

Olympia realized better than her husband Blair's shrewd wisdom. After one long breath the house broke into a roar of applause, which echoed and re-echoed through the cob-webby rafters of the old rink. Beverly bowed and smiled, in answer to the shouting crowd. He flushed with egotistic triumph and his cruel teeth gleamed in exultation.

When the uproar died away to a few spasmodic outbursts, a man rose at the back of the platform and walked slowly to the footlights. Olympia roused herself with a start. Until she heard some one introduce William Prince of Orange McCroy she had almost forgotten that her husband was scheduled to meet an opponent. A chuckle of good-natured amuse-

ment rippled through the audience, as it does in a drama where a comedian, half grotesque, half pathetic, strolls out upon the stage. McCroy's appearance promised entertainment, or perhaps an occasional moment when tears might come with a sudden blur. He stood waiting for the Chairman to finish his speech. There was a tremor of anxiety in his gentle eyes.

Some one switched on the current of an electric fan. It began to move the dense air, then paused, and purring softly lifted a thin lock of hair on McCroy's head and blew it out over his forehead like a rooster's comb. His black string tie unknotted and a breeze whipped the limp ends across his mouth. The audience shouted with merriment as if it had been a stage trick contrived for their amusement. The color faded from the man's face, his lips grew pallid, his long fingers twitched with a convulsive clasp. Olympia smiled, then somewhere from the better part of her nature came a throb of pity while she contrasted him with her strong-jawed, sinewy husband.

"McCroy ought to be pitted against an opponent of his own size," she thought sympathetically.

The Chairman, who was addicted to long, garrulous nothings, spun out his introduction. Unconsciously he was giving McCroy time to pull himself together. A grim look of deter-

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mination crept into the mild, homely face. Olympia moved her chair slightly. Beverly sat staring at the man with an amused, derisive sneer. More than once his wife had caught the same expression in his eyes when he looked at her and for one tempestuous moment her soul was torn by a raging hatred of the man she had married.

When McCroy began to speak, a voice from the farthest corner of the gallery shouted, "Give it to us louder, you mutt!"

He paused for a moment to summon strength of voice and courage, then he cleared his throat, threw back his head and began again. He held no roll of paper in his hand as Beverly had done. He did not even refer to notes. In a few slow sentences he told what Cynthia Pike hoped to do for the people of the tenth district, if they should send her to Congress. They were arguments and ambitions and possibilities which the people had not heard before.

Back somewhere in his career the man had possessed a gift of oratory and learned how to use it. Such a power had been lying wrapped in a napkin for years, but gradually it returned. As he felt a thousand eyes bent upon him, fluency came to his tongue and vigor to gestures which had once been habit. His quiet earnestness was an odd contrast to Beverly's blatant egotism. When he stopped, his opponent leaped to his feet with impetuous

haste. Before he could speak a word McCroy began again.

"I want," he said, "to mention one calumny against Mrs. Pike. It has been said that I went to see her on the night she was nominated. I did."

A flutter of surprise ran through the audience.

"In the North," he continued, "also among old nations of the world or wherever we bring traditions of the fatherland to crude new regions of America, one unfailing courtesy is observed: the man who has been defeated goes to congratulate the man who wins. It is a custom observed by pugilists and baseball teams. I have done it more than once because five times I have been defeated when I ran for Congress."

A ripple of laughter chased through the house.

"To congratulate a lady whom I had never seen, called for a new code of ceremony, a new code of courage. That night I went to wish her well. There was no chance to approach her because people did not go home till midnight. I had decided to call the next day when I saw her on the lawn tying up a trampled rose bush. I spoke to her. She accepted my congratulations graciously, and asked me to talk with her. We sat on the piazza steps till the clock struck one, when I rose and bade her good-night. I mention this, not because it is

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of consequence, but because in justice to the lady you ought to know the truth."

Olympia met her husband's gaze with terror in her eyes. She had suggested the calumny. Men were rising to their feet, but the enthusiasm of applause was mingled with hoots and jeers. Beverly glanced at his wife with a demoniac smile. His teeth gritted together and his wolf eyes blazed with sudden fury. When the clamor changed to hisses, McCroy raised his hand as if asking for silence.

"This house," he began, "holds scores of men and women whose memory can reach back to the birth of our State. I want to carry you with me to that April day when fifty thousand men and women rushed across the border of Oklahoma to stake claims where now stand splendid cities and luxurious homes. The second generation know of Run Day merely as a legend. To us, each incident looms up distinctly like a scene in a great drama.

"When I came to Oklahoma I was a boy preparing for college and eager for adventure. I looked out from the car window on a multitude moving slowly across the wilderness. The highway was merely a wheel track plowing through buffalo grass and red dirt. Over it trudged men and women, sometimes with children. Some rode on horseback or 'homed' in a prairie schooner. When our train stopped at civilization—we called it civilization because a

water tank, a station house and a government land office made a spot in the prairie—I tossed my baggage from the window, jumped after it and found myself among the strangest mob ever gathered together in America. I listened to Garrow, a man who rode with me from Kansas City. 'I've coppered the situation, Boy,' he said; 'if that crowd runs from one spot of territory there'll be a stampede. Let's move farther along the border.'

"All day we tramped the prairie with the promised land before our eyes. The grass was growing green, birds were building their nests in the underbrush, the trees had begun to leaf and patches of violets as blue as bits fallen from the sky were—"

McCroy was pushed rudely aside. Beverly stood beside him with a mocking smile on his face.

"We came here to listen to a debate," he thundered, "not to a nature story or to celebrate Run Day. I'm too busy to sit listening to drivel like—"

"Ah, g'wan," shouted a hoarse voice from the back of the hall, "you ain't the only chigger in the dirt!"

The nominee tossed his head angrily, but turned when a hand touched his shoulder. It was Neale his manager.

"Don't stir 'em up, Burke. Let the man finish his little piece. It'll do nothin' but

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amuse them. Heaven knows," he laughed, "McCroy's as harmless as kidney cure."

Beverly followed Neale's advice, although in a knotted scowl upon his forehead, Olympia saw a perplexed anxiety dawn.

"As we tramped on," continued McCroy, "we caught up with a home-made prairie wagon. It held a few bits of furniture saved from the old home. Two raw-boned horses had dragged it a hundred miles across the Texas prairies. Behind trailed a raft with a coop of chickens, a plow and food enough to grub-stake a little family during the journey. A lad, who had taken his dead father's place, was bringing his mother and two little sisters across the State to stake a claim in the new territory. Twilight closed in when we caught up with the Texans. We heard a child's voice singing and saw the glow of a camp-fire through the dusk so we steered for it. They had camped in a grove of hackberry trees beside the river. Home, any sort of a home, looked good to us that night. The wind had grown bitterly cold. As it howled across the prairie, clouds of alkali dust stung our faces and made us dream of water, for we had not passed a spring or creek since noon.

"The little family was German. We understood only a word here and there but the welcome they offered was eloquent. Although provisions were growing scant in the prairie

schooner, the woman fried salt pork for us and baked corn bread in the ashes. She mothered me as if I had been a boy of her own. The lad was as kind as she and the two little girls looked like angels in that lonely wilderness. God bless each one of them for the cheer and hospitality they shared with us that night when we first slept within sight of Oklahoma soil."

McCroy paused as if his eyes gazed across a stretch of years at a scene too sacred to put into words.

"We lay down beside the fire wrapped in our blankets, but I could not sleep. Once, I rose to heap fresh wood on the embers and watched the dry sticks snap and blaze making a red circle of light in the blackness. I looked at my watch. It was midnight. Not a sound broke the silence except the breathing of tired sleepers, the swish of the creek and the startled chirp of a bird that had been waked by the firelight. I lay thinking—there were a score of things for a lad to think about that night—when I heard a rustle in the underbrush. A man's eyes stared at me through a thicket of young green leaves. It was a mean face and a rough stubbly beard made him look like the tramp that skulks away from a roadside. His clothes were torn and his shoe soles gaped apart from the leather. As I faced his cruel eyes, I thought I would rather have watched a coyote prowling round our camp. I heard a move-

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ment in the prairie wagon. It was the German woman. She stepped down and passed me softly as if she feared to wake us. She bent over the man among the bushes and whispered in her low, purring guttural, trying to make him understand. She offered him food and shelter and warmth. He crept after her. She brought him something to eat and drink, then wrapped him in an old gray blanket which she dragged from her own bed. He lay there beside us. I did not speak to him. Ten minutes later he fell asleep."

A strange clucking noise disturbed Olympia, while she listened to McCroy's story. Beverly's eyes were bent on the man who stood talking. She wondered that nobody noticed the ghastly look on her husband's face. His hands were gripping his knees and his shoulders drew up to his neck as if in absolute terror. A greenish pallor stole over his skin, the clean-shaven lips were sucked in so they looked like a narrow slit on his face. His eyelids sagged but he did not blink, the sharp, black pupils watched McCroy with a horror-stricken gaze. His mouth moved as if he spoke under his breath and his wife saw the gleam of savage teeth.

She lost the thread of the story for a moment then McCroy's words grew tangible again.

"Across the creek lay a stretch of well-

watered, rich, level land. Garrow, who was an old sett, showed the German lad how to rush and stake his claim, then to plow around it and throw up a dwelling of some sort. The man, who had blown into camp during the night, left before we did. He was going back, so he said, to run for a bit of prairie, which had looked good to him. We tramped farther west. Garrow and I were alone in the world, we could take pot luck; the German boy had to make a home for three women.

“Next day came the Run. The mob had been gathering for days. Boomers camped along the line in shacks, tents, wagons or anything that could be dumped in the center of a claim and called a dwelling. A troop of cavalry kept guard. At noon when the bugle rang out, a shout went up and the Run began. Garrow and I ran on foot, carrying our blankets, and all our worldly belongings as thousands of other men and women did. We were outdistanced by boomers, who rode spanking rigs or drove mule teams, but not a heart failed, every starter dreamed of winning a prize. Men on bronchos and mustangs flew across the uneven prairie to stake wider claims fifty miles away. Cowboys leaped ditches and waterholes, cleared narrow gulches with one crazy leap or sent their pintoes rushing down one side of a ravine and up the other. Over the country as far as the eye could reach, spread an unfurled fan of hu-

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man beings claiming tracts of new territory we slower travelers could not reach.

"Until nightfall I scarcely drew a long breath. Garrow and I staked a claim at the foot of a hillside. We hammered in the posts with our heels, and tossed up a tent made from a cot with blankets draped over it. When twilight fell, ten thousand men and women were 'homing' on claims where seven hours before violets made blue patches on the virgin prairie. Garrow and I did not sleep that night. We sat beside a camp-fire in the middle of our claim feeding the blaze with dry grass and brush.

"The plain was dotted with tents which looked like white-winged birds. It was a night of strange noises. Hammers rang out while men built shack homes; once I heard a baby crying. Occasionally the Rebel yell or an Indian war-whoop made us jump. Sometimes a pistol shot brought a pause in the subdued hum of voices. We felt safe enough, for a soft pad-pad of cavalry hoofs sounded near by and camp-fires or torches twinkled everywhere.

"Next day we were a city, a city that bragged of a bank, a newspaper and a hotel even if every street was a waste of buffalo grass or cactus. We held a convention, elected a mayor, then gathered together, a queer disheveled bunch of humanity, to sing 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.'

"During the days which followed, God tried out human souls. The muddy water we drank did its work, the heat of early spring was followed by cold winds rolling up alkali dust off the desert in vast red clouds. We slept in the open under a deluge of chill rain, then waded for days over soggy prairie. A few doctors who came in with the Run had their hands full. The weak-kneed gave up the fight; each day we watched them in straggling knots turn their faces toward home. Boom towns were deserted, streets disappeared in a night. City lots were plowed under and seeded. Only the fittest survived. Every day the police brought in gamblers, lot jumpers and sharpers to meet swift justice. We listened to stories told by men who wandered in from outlying regions, about being forestalled by some crafty sooner. Before the bugle called he had lain there hidden like a wild creature in ravines and bottomlands, learning by heart every pathway and ford of the wilderness. Many a settler was driven off by a sooner who seemed to spring from the earth or drop from the clouds. Occasionally the story was an unholy record of robbery and murder.

"One night Garrow and I sat in our little shack planning our future. The outside world was as dark as pitch. Rain beat on the tin roof and across the plain came a howling wind which

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shook the walls and battered at the windows. During a lull in the storm we heard a rap at the door. The gleam from our fire fell upon a woman with two children clinging to her skirt. We drew them in and set them beside the hearth. It was the German woman. Her rosy color and her blithe laugh had gone. She was hollow-eyed and fever was burning in her veins. The children clutched at me in mortal terror; they were starved, draggled, nearly naked. Garrow and I fed them, making them as comfortable as we could, then we went in search of Freidheim, an old German who had staked a near-by claim. The woman told him her story. God, what a story that was—the story of the most infamous sooner that ever stepped on Oklahoma soil. It was a story you all know."

A shout broke the silence as McCroy paused.
"What was his name?"

"Wait—in a minute—I will tell you. First let me finish my story. Men saddled horses, every broncho in town was ours for the asking, and through the darkness a score of them led by Garrow went tearing like mad, through black jacks and waterholes, over sandhills and oozing prairie, across rivers where they did not stop to search for a ford. I stayed at home, for the children refused to leave me, and the woman was dying. All through the night Freidheim's wife and I listened to her rave the story of her

wrongs. The boy had been shot, the horses stolen and their claim usurped by the man she fed and sheltered on the night when he crept beside her fire. Afterwards he drove them away leaving them marooned at the bottom of a ravine, to die. Under the hot sun and beating rain they had wandered on with nothing to guide them but my name. How they lived, to reach us, God knows. She died before the men returned.

"They took the law in their own hands, tore a whimpering wretch from a cot in the woman's prairie wagon and at break of dawn strung him up on a cottonwood tree. They knew cavalymen were close at their heels and they were in no mood to give up a victim to justice.

"When Garrow came back he whispered to me a horror-stricken fear that they had lynched the wrong man. The sooner had a pal. He, too, might have been worthy of hanging but he was not so base as the reptile who had slept under a blanket the poor soul took from her own bed. I knew when Garrow told his story that it was not the man who crept close to the camp-fire that night. I had watched him from my bed in the darkness and as he bared his arm to wrap the blanket about him I saw branded above his elbow an ugly smudged 'B.' At some other dastardly moment in his life he had escaped punishment. We went to the cottonwood grove and saw the body buried. The man

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they lynched bore no brand on his arm. Bisset had escaped."

"Bisset, Jake Bisset, the sooner—" a voice like the growl of a wild animal came from the middle of the hall.

"Yes, Jake Bisset. Years afterward, he came back to Oklahoma under the name of Burke Beverly!"

McCroy turned sharply with the man's name on his lips. Beverly, like a hunted tiger at bay, faced the footlights while he retreated slowly backwards. Men, who seemed to have lost power of action, moved to make a path for him. In his bloodshot eyes the pupils gleamed like sparks of fire. His lips parted as fangs do over ferocious teeth. His shaking fingers tried to cock a pistol. A man sprang at him suddenly with clutching hands. Beverly raised the pistol to his face and snarling fiercely made a frantic effort to steady the hand which held it. Some one struck at his elbow and the shot whistled out overhead. During one moment of tense silence men and women waited as if listening for a human shriek. Instead they heard the shiver of breaking glass. The uproar broke out again like one savage, bloodthirsty shout. Beverly glanced down at the audience, which came plunging forward in a dense horde ready to send him to his reward. Here and there a woman screamed as if in pain or a man cursed. He turned to his wife.

She looked up frozen by terror or horror. Suddenly malignant hatred and triumph blazed in her face. She realized that she held the whip hand. She moved her eyes as if searching for something, lifted the long train of her gown in one hand, dashed a man aside and grasped a small lever set in the archway of the platform. She drew one long breath, turned the loop of metal abruptly, then waited, listening for a sound to come out of the abrupt silence, which fell upon the audience as it was plunged into darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEENIE ESPOUSES SUFFRAGE

DEBONAIR knelt beside his mother's bed with his arm thrown affectionately about her shoulders. She smiled into his eyes and her fingers smoothed his shining hair while she listened to Jane Hagner read a column of election returns from the *Oklahoman*.

"There never was such a victory known!" said the old woman triumphantly. "Never! The few votes Beverly got came from places where the news hadn't gone before folks started for the polls. Late in the afternoon, so the paper says, when the story got round, men an' women who voted the Democratic ticket came throngin' back, crazy to change their ballots."

"It wasn't a victory for me exactly," mused Cynthia. "It was a lynching of Beverly."

"He won't escape lynchin' this time," Jane Hagner smiled grimly.

"You look as if you would attend the ceremony yourself," suggested Debonair.

"It isn't a very decent confession for a woman to make, but if my stomach could stand it, I believe—"

"No, you wouldn't," interrupted Cynthia.

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"You're as chicken-hearted as a baby; besides, with your stern sense of justice—"

"My stern sense of justice would have sent Beverly to his future home twenty-five years ago. Now," she added fiercely, "it looks to me if they don't put somebody on his track besides these fool police, that he'll slip through our fingers again."

"I don't understand exactly," a look of perplexity crept into Cynthia's eyes, "how he escaped last night."

"Neither do I." Jane Hagner set fiercely to work upon her knitting. "There I set, down in a front seat, with Reuben alongside of me, so close to the stage we could have reached out an' grabbed Beverly by the leg. We didn't, the more's the pity. I hadn't no idea what sort o' story McCroy had up his sleeve. I knew Beverly was the ruffian sooner, that was all. As far's I hear, William Prince of Orange held the whole house spellbound, jest as he did me."

"He certainly did," broke in Debonair. "Beverly's face looked like a hunted coyote, while that shaking hand of his kept trying to cock his pistol. I couldn't have stirred, though I was getting ready to leap on the stage and gag him. Suddenly it went—dark. Then, the first thing I remember was watching Hiram Beale light a match. He held the flickering spot of light over his head moving it as you would a candle, looking for Beverly, I guess.

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It seemed hours before the electricity was switched on."

"Even then they didn't get to work," cried Jane Hagner. "I thought I'd be crushed to death when that mob of people surged forward to the stage. It beats me why folks wan't killed instead of just a few of them bein' bruised or havin' bones broken. Then to think of him gettin' away—it was scandalous!"

"I can't understand," insisted Cynthia, "how he escaped."

"He couldn't have done it except for Olympia. Deb tells of watchin' Beverly's face. Somehow, when McCroy was speakin', my eyes were pinned on Olympia. I've always said she has a keen mind in spite of the piffle she writes. I think she knew what was comin', before McCroy told about the German woman driftin' in that rainy night. Any woman married to Burke Beverly must have sounded the black depths of his nature before she lived six weeks with him. You could see in her eyes what she was thinkin'. Most likely when she was a young one she'd heard that old story about Bisset, the sooner. It's been a Blue-beard yarn round here ever since I remember. I watched her face. First of all it was horror, then she was tryin' desperately to think. I'd ought to have knowed she was plannin' how to escape. Someway I never thought of her switchin' off the lights."

"I don't understand even then," declared Cynthia, "why he wasn't caught."

"Men on the platform tell of bein' tossed out of the way. In the dark they couldn't see who did the pushin'. Olympia led him through a dressin' room, so it's thought, where she'd left her wraps, an' they got out by a door into the alley. Their auto was waitin' on a side street. A kid tells about a man an' woman jumpin' into the car. She cranked up the machine an' started like mad. So far they hain't been heard of."

"I wish," confessed Cynthia again, "I might have won the election, really won it."

"Won it, Mother?" Debonair leaped to his feet. "Great Scott, don't you get on to your majority? Isn't twenty-five thousand of a plurality winning?"

"I mean won it—myself. It isn't winning a fight when you step over your opponent's dead body."

"My dear," Jane Hagner spoke impressively, "I wish you could have seen the polls. All day long men stood swearin' in people who hadn't registered. Even Teenie—"

"Teenie! What about Teenie?"

"I was stationed at the Hume Street booth watchin' when I heard a brogue you could have cut with a knife. I knew right off who 'twas. There ain't another lingo like it in town. It was Teenie, turning her Scotch rhetoric loose on a man because he wouldn't let her vote."

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"Teenie vote! Oh!" Cynthia went off in a convulsion of laughing. "Don't tell me Teenie voted! I'll never forget the day I tried to make her register."

"The man explained that she couldn't vote till she'd registered. They set about swearin' her in an' discovered she'd never been naturalized. It took more'n one man to explain that she couldn't be naturalized an' then vote ten minutes after. The last I saw o' Teenie, she had neither been naturalized, registered nor voted and she was headed for home with a face on her that would have stopped every clock in town."

"Did you speak to her?" asked Cynthia.

"Do you suppose I wanted to converse with a cyclone?"

"You don't understand Teenie. I bly at the last minute she decided her vote. It carry the day for me. It was heroic."

"Perhaps it was"—Jane Hagner's knitting needles clicked sharply—"only I don't quite get into line with Teenie's heroics. I understand Indians better'n I do Scotch. I've been tryin' to figure out what you'll do with Teenie in Washington. I reckon you'll take her along?"

"Mercy, yes. I should as soon think of leaving Debonair here."

"I can see Teenie helping us to break into high society," observed the lad gloomily.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRAIL OF BISSET

MICHAEL, stop a minute. Aren't we near Mr. McCroy's ranch?" asked Cynthia.

"Within two miles of it, ma'am. It's off on that road." The chauffeur pointed over his shoulder. "We're headed now for Kingfisher."

Mrs. Pike glanced at the small clock on the auto.

"Half past ten," she mused. "Turn round and drive to McCroy's. The Kingfisher business can wait if necessary."

When Michael swung the big car round in the empty road, a flush crept into Cynthia's face. She laid a cool hand against her burning cheek. It was ridiculous to explain to a chauffeur that she had never intended to go to Kingfisher. She felt eager yet hesitant at the thought of calling upon a man, who apparently had forgotten her very existence. Six months had passed since election day. Once during her convalescence Jane Hagner brought McCroy to call. He sat awkwardly on the edge of a satin sofa for ten minutes and answered the ques-

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tions she asked. When she thanked him for the service he had done, he began to talk about a new fuel he was inventing. A few minutes later when Mrs. Hagner rose and suggested they go home, he looked inexpressibly relieved.

The garden beside the river lay in a warm slumber beneath the May sunshine. Beyond stretched the blue green of the prairie till its edge was lost in the gray horizon.

Cynthia opened the gate in the low fence and walked in, sniffing delightedly, for it was a place of pleasant odors. Overhead the wind shook out fragrance from a snowy-blossomed crabapple and yellow pansies were hidden behind boxwood hedges. The acrid sweetness of sedges, of thin swathes of young bulrushes, sweet flag and the weedy things which lave in wet, green places, whiffed up from the edge of the creek. At the end of the pergola lay a garden, that blazed with color.

Cynthia bent over to latch the gate, then moved slowly over the paved walk. The pergola was buried under a mat of grape-vines, their shadow felt restful after the glare of sun on the prairie. She took off her hat and veil. The wind had knotted short tendrils of her hair into small fluffy curls and wisped them about the nape of her neck. When she left the shadow for the sunshine she stepped out on a lawn.

A cloying fragrance came from the snowy ai-

grettes on a wide-spreading chestnut tree. Its branches drooped over the bench where she had talked with McCroy that day in the fall. She sat down, watching the flicker of leaf shadows make a wonderful pattern on her white gown, and drew a long breath of pure delight, then she sighed. With all her lavishly flung wealth she owned nothing like this. She had grown to hate her snug, clean-shaven lawn, with its orderly clumps of shrubbery, its geometrical flower beds and neatly barbered trees. She felt a passionate longing for untidy places, for riotous, unclipped things like the hedge of wild iris and the shivering flags, that circled a little pond beside her.

While she sat with her eyes bent on the flutter of green blades about the pool, a face peered through the sedges, the face of a little girl with brown eyes and tightly braided tails of yellow hair.

"Where did you come from, Lady?" she asked.

"I came in at the gate," Cynthia laughed.

"Where did you come from?"

"That's my home." The child pointed over her shoulder at the white house among the trees.

"Are you Mr. McCroy's little girl?"

She nodded.

"I didn't know," began Cynthia perplexedly, "that—"

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"That I lived here?" interrupted the child.

"Yes."

"Well, I do. It's my home now forever and ever. Ain't it a nice home?"

"The nicest home I ever saw."

The child leaped suddenly to her feet.

"Come and see my fish," she pleaded.

Cynthia parted the grasses and looked down at the pool. Through the clear water dashed a swirl of silvery bodies. One speckled trout hung motionless near the edge of the basin. The sun revealed gleams of color in the weedy bottom.

"That's Hermes." The little girl pointed to the shining trout.

"Has each fish a name?"

"Yes. Father William reads to me nights from a fairy book that was written thousands of years ago. The people in it have lovely names, much prettier'n William or Shamus or mine, so I give them to my fish. I asked Father William to change his name. He won't. He says it's been good enough for years an' it'll last him as long as he lives."

"What did you name this fish?" asked Cynthia as one lithe speckled thing flashed out from the shadowy brim of the pool to eat a crumb the child dropped in the water.

"That's Pelias. Besides there's Kopyrus, Isis and Manlius."

"What is your name?"

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"It *was* Rebecca," answered the child with a grimace that lifted her small nose. "I hate Rebecca. Father William said I might choose another name if it wasn't any harder to say. I took Bona Dea. Ain't that sweet? 'Tain't much longer than Rebecca." She glanced up eagerly at Cynthia while she counted off each syllable on her fingers, "'Re-becc-a'—'Bo-na De-a.' Is it?"

"No," acquiesced the woman.

"Bona Dea sounds like this garden and everything in it. Rebecca sounds like the Refuge. How I hate it!"

"Where was the Refuge?"

"In an ugly city out West. 'Twas a brick house, oh, a fearful big house. In one long room there were hundreds of beds, thousands of them, little scrubby beds, so narrow that when you moved you fell out on the floor. They were covered with thin, gray spreads. The walls were brown and ugly. Downstairs in a big kitchen with a yellow floor there were a million beetles. Annie Malone called them clocks—because you could hear 'em make a tickin' noise as they walked in the dark. Once," a shiver ran through the child's thin body, "once a beetle crawled over me in bed. I screamed myself into a fit. There were bars at the windows like in a prison."

"You poor little thing!" cried Cynthia.

"Miss Fordham gave us our lessons, not nice.

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lessons like Father William's. He don't rave an' scold or slap when I don't remember nine times eight. I thin~~x~~,” mused the child, “nines are the worst thing in the whole multiplication table, don't you?”

“Yes,” laughed the woman. “I remember I always hated nines just as you do.”

“I'm glad you did.” Bona Dea touched Cynthia's hand sympathetically. “Besides we had to work in the kitchen. I scrubbed floors an' ironed an' washed dishes an' peeled potatoes.”

“Mercy! You're nothing but a baby.”

“I'm nine.” Bona Dea threw back her shoulders with fine importance.

“Nine! and work like that!”

“Work like that?” repeated the child. “The work wan't half as bad's totin' Tommy Nolan round.”

“Was Tommy your brother?”

“No, ma'am, Tommy wan't no blood relation, thanks be! He's a little refuger. He could ha' walked if he'd wanted to, only he was ugly an' wouldn't. He scratched an' bit an' pulled my hair an' spit,” she confessed disgustedly. “I hated him. I could have pounded him, only, if I'd been caught! Now—” the frown of hatred faded the child's face. “Now, thanks be, I forget Tommy an' all of 'em.”

She dropped on her knees again before the pool and dabbled her fingers in the cool water.

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Hermes darted away to hide under a bulbous water hyacinth.

"What do you do here all day long?" asked Cynthia.

"Eat," the child looked up at her with a contented smile. "Eat, three times a day an' as often in between meals as I want. Shamus cooks the best things you ever knowed." Bona Dea smacked her lips. "Father William says—"

"Do you mean Mr. McCroy?"

"Yes."

"Why do you call him Father William?"

"Don't you know? 'You are old, Father William,' the young man cried, 'the few locks that are left you are gray.' He was reading that to me one night. I asked if I mightn't call him Father William. He said he didn't care. Ever since—"

"Do you go to school?" asked Cynthia.

"No, ma'am. I figure with Father William an' write copy an' spell. At night he reads stories to me an' Shamus. Shamus teaches me to sing. Oh," cried the child ecstatically, "you'd ought to hear Shamus sing."

"I have heard Shamus sing," confessed the woman with a laugh.

"Not 'Oh, this is livin'!' That's one Shamus wrote himself."

Cynthia shook her head.

"Did you ever hear this?"

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She lifted her piping voice and sang to a weird tune:

"I cannot eat but little meat,
My stomach is not good,
But sure I think that I can drink
With him that wears a hood."

"It sounds like Shamus," confessed Mrs. Pike.

"Are you a friend o' Father William's?" Bona Dea looked up at the woman curiously.

"Father William has been a good friend of mine," she replied.

"He's good to everybody." The child looked away into the green cavern of the pergola with dreamy eyes. "He wouldn't hurt that." She lifted a writhing caterpillar which fell from a tree into the pond, and set it on a blade of grass. "He couldn't help bein' good any more'n Mary Ernestina could help bein' cussed."

"Who is Mary Ernestina?"

"The old cat as run the Refuge. Here's Father William now—"

McCroy came wandering down the path with his hand outstretched and a welcome shining in his eyes. Bona Dea jumped to her feet and caught his fingers between her small grubby fists with a sudden spasm of feminine jealousy. He glanced down at her with his engaging smile.

"It was kind of you to come." He turned to

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Cynthia. "I am glad too that you came in the spring. It is lovelier here in May than during any month in the year."

"It is lovely. But why," she spoke as if a thought had suddenly occurred to her, "why did you never come to see me? Are you never in town?"

"Yes," he confessed.

"Then why don't you come to see me?"

"I did not suppose—" he turned his eyes away and looked down into Bona Dea's eager face—"I had not dreamed you would care to see me."

"After all you did for me?" murmured Cynthia.

"Tell me about yourself, about your plans, when you go away and that sort of thing."

"I do not go till November, just in time to take my seat in Congress. Oh," she cried suddenly, "I wish so often that it had not happened."

"What?"

"I wish I had never won the election."

"When I ran it kept me awake nights, I was so afraid I might win," confessed McCroy. "I thought you were eager to go."

"There are days when I am, then next day I feel differently. The time flies so. First it was a year away, then months, now I count it by weeks. Sometimes I grow absolutely cold with terror as I think of filling a place among

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statesmen who know about politics and everything."

The man picked a blossom from a snowball bush beside them and pulled it slowly to shreds, dropping the petals in a white shower on the grass.

"Why do you go?" he asked.

"Why? Because I must go," she confessed helplessly. "What else can I do? It would be unconstitutional, unless I were to die," she laughed. "I don't know what they would do then. Perhaps it's unconstitutional to die. I hear that word constitutional till it seems there are only two ways left for me to tread the earth, constitutionally or unconstitutionally. Then there's Parliamentary law. Did you ever study Parliamentary law?"

"Yes." A smile flickered across his face. "The man who invented Parliamentary law ought to have been—" He paused as if unable to fit a punishment to the crime.

"Boiled in oil?" suggested Cynthia abruptly.

"Perhaps."

"I study Parliamentary law day and night. Blair says I must have what he calls a working knowledge of it."

"Who's Blair?"

"John Blair is a newspaper man. He wrote that speech for Beverly,—the one he spoke the night before election. One day he came to tell me about it. Beverly gave him fifty dollars

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for it. The man is honest as daylight, and he returned the money to the Democratic Committee since Beverly can't be found. He felt he had done me an injustice. You see he had not dreamed Beverly was so bad."

"Nobody did."

"I have engaged Blair as my secretary. He is teaching me now, hundreds of things I ought to know." The woman sighed. "I am frightfully ignorant. Some things I can study by degrees. Parliamentary law I can't; they don't allow a secretary, it seems, to go out with his Congressman on the floor of the House. If they did and I felt I could have Blair to coach me I wouldn't be so afraid. I go to bed with that dreadful little red book lying on the table beside a drop light. If I can't sleep or if I wake up during the night, I study Parliamentary law. Sometimes it puts me to sleep."

"I used to find it useful for that," confessed McCroy. "It really cured me of insomnia."

"If I had stopped to think what it meant for a woman to go into Congress," began Cynthia, wrinkling her brow, "I would not have consented, no matter what they said. I was such a fool."

"No, not that," protested McCroy.

"Yes, that exactly, a fool, a plain, everyday, egotistic, ridiculous fool. I am a fool, I was and I will be until I have lived out the two years and come back to the place where I belong,

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where God set me in the world, simply to be a woman."

"It is a beautiful,—a very beautiful place," said the man, reddening.

"And to dream of leaving it for politics," cried Cynthia disdainfully. "Whatever put it into any woman's head to think of such a thing? I know how the great big public, which loves everything funny, is going to look at me. At first, I enjoyed having my picture in papers all over the country. Everybody wanted it. I liked being interviewed and written about and getting letters from strangers and being kowtowed to and having babies named for me."

"Did people do that?"

"Two days after I was elected a letter came from Tulsa. The mother told me she had named her baby Cynthia Pike Pickles. Think of a poor little girl facing the world with a name like that. I sent her a check for a hundred dollars. The story got into the papers and babies are named for me every day. It is awful. They are such ugly babies too! I get their pictures. There are scores of them now. I can't send each one a hundred dollars. Sometimes they write and ask why I don't."

"Who, the babies?" asked Bona Dea.

"No, you little goose," Cynthia laughed. "I had forgotten you were listening. No, their mothers do. Then I began to order newspaper

clippings. There must be a thousand dollars' worth of them now, there are books filled with them. I read them at first, now I am tired of seeing my name in print. They are laughing at me from Maine to Alaska."

"Father William," cried Bona Dea, "who has been mean to the beautiful lady?"

"Nobody, dear," cried Mrs. Pike quickly. "The lady has simply been a fool; now she is learning things she ought to have known ages ago."

"Things like fractions and the date of the battle of Balaklava and where the Bay of Fundy is and terrors of things like that?" The child's voice was full of sympathy.

"Yes, terrors of things like that, only much worse," confessed Cynthia gaily. "If you don't learn things when you are little they are horribly hard to learn when you grow old."

"Bona Dea," suggested McCroy, "we are going to the house now. Give Shamus a message from me. Tell him to roast the chicken a nice, crisp brown, and cook plenty of asparagus; you may pick it for him; and give us strawberries and coffee, plenty of good, hot coffee. Tell him to put another plate on the table, because we have company."

"Who is Bona Dea?" asked Cynthia, while she followed her host into the cool, gray living room.

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The man did not answer. He crossed the room and opened his desk, returning with a small jewel case in his hand.

"When I went in search of Beverly," he began slowly, "I traced him through Indiana and Nebraska, then up through Minnesota. Wherever he had gone he left a trail of memories, memories of the brutal way he treated a woman."

"Was that when he left here, after the Run, I mean?"

"No, it was years later than that. Nobody knows where he went after the Run. He lost himself as he has done again."

"And the woman?"

"She wasn't a woman. She was a girl, 'a slip of a thing with big, pathetic eyes and a childish mouth,' that was how one man, who knew her years ago, described her to me. Beverly's name was Strawn in those days, Otis Strawn."

"I don't understand how you found him," remarked Cynthia.

"Shamus struck his trail, he has a scent like a pointer. I was telling you about the woman."

"Yes."

"She stuck to him as nothing would have done except a woman or a dog. He served a term once in a Kansas jail for half murdering her. When he came out, there she stood outside the prison gate ready to forgive him and

begin life over again. She carried a tiny baby in her arms."

"Oh," cried Cynthia in a pitiful whisper, "what a ridiculous heart God does give to a woman sometimes."

"Yes." There was a husky tone in the man's voice.

"What became of her?"

"She died, up in Nebraska, of ill usage. He cleared out. They buried her among paupers. The baby was taken to a Refuge."

"Then it was Bona Dea!"

The man nodded, then opened the tiny case in his hand and lifted a locket which he laid in Cynthia's palm. She turned it over and found a photograph on the other side.

"They took this off Bona Dea's neck at the Refuge," he explained.

Cynthia looked at the man's gentle face through a blur of tears.

"The child told me out there in the garden," she began in a trembling voice, "that you were good. She said you couldn't help being good, to everybody. A child knows."

"Any man would have done what I did."

"Would they?" asked Cynthia with a sob. Her eyes dropped again to the faded face in the locket. It was the dreamy, childish face of the girl which hung in a beaded frame on the wall behind the man's head.

CHAPTER XX

THE DEBUT OF A CONGRESSWOMAN

CYNTHIA PIKE paused beside a window and buttoned her glove. The movement and tumult of the street below melted into an indefinite blur, beyond lay a shimmer of the White House through its faded garden. The monument shaft had become atmospherically detached and loomed against the flat sky with its base lost in a gray mist. A numb terror had suddenly seized her. Hitherto, the morning of her "Inauguration," as Debonair called it, had lain in the distance like a day of triumph. She was beginning to realize that she—utterly unfit for such a function—was stepping from the role of private citizen to a place which no other woman had filled. Six months ago her position as member of Congress had seemed an antic of fate; today it was a reality which could not be evaded.

She pulled off her gloves, knotted them into a ball, tossed them on the bureau and moved nervously around the room. While passing a mirror, she caught a reflection of Teenie's face, watching her with stolid concern.

"For Heaven's sake," she cried impetuously, "stare out at that window—at anything—at anybody—except at me."

"Ye're no' so bad tae look at." The servant turned to a shoe she had been polishing.

"I don't care how I look—yes, I do. I wish I were sixty and the image of Cornelia Billup."

"Why should ye envy poor Miss Billup her physiog?"

"Don't be a fool, Teenie." There was irritation in her mistress' voice. "Can't you understand, I'm a snarled bunch of nerves."

"After all ye've been through, why in time should ye be nervous the day?"

"Think of the men in the House! They will look on me as a screaming joke, or an intruder, or as some one they have to be preternaturally polite to, when they are longing to kick me out." Cynthia walked from one window to another with a quick, impatient tread. "It's ghastly."

"It seems tae me—" Teenie drew her brush slowly across a shoe—"that ye might have taken this into consideration before the noo."

"Don't you suppose I have taken it into consideration? Last night I woke up screaming. I dreamed the Speaker was dragging me across the marble floor by my hair. He flung me out of the Capitol, down that long flight of steps,—into the middle of a mob which hooted and hissed and laughed. Behind him, inside the

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bronze doors, stood the men in Congress, four hundred of them, howling like coyotes. That's the sort of nightmare I've been having!"

"The first plunge will be over before a great while."

"What comfort is that when the plunge lies straight in front of me?" Cynthia resumed her frantic tread about the room. "Besides, think of the women in the galleries! Don't I know how they will discuss me and pick me in pieces. The paper says a crowd will be there long before the doors are open, that it is the most interesting Congress of years and that I am the star feature."

"Tae be sure," acquiesced the Scotchwoman. "For what did ye ramp roun' the country last fall if it was no' tae be the star feature? The President himsel' will tak' a back seat the day."

"The President does not go to Congress."

"He doesn't?" There was a note of disappointment in the woman's voice. "Will ye tell me what he's paid a salary for if no tae gang an' open up things?"

"He earns his salary," laughed Cynthia, "without attending to that duty. Were you going?"

"I'd jist thought about it."

"I'm afraid it's useless." Cynthia glanced at the clock. "The House convenes at twelve. It's nearly eleven, there will scarcely be standing room. The doors open at nine."

"Three feet o' space would accommodate me, gin I were set upright." Teenie rose to answer a knock at the door. "Debonair's waitin' for you doon in the auto," she announced.

"I ought to be there now." Mrs. Pike rambled aimlessly about the room. "I want gloves, fresh, new gloves, I can't wear these." She pointed to the pair she had discarded.

While Teenie lifted a pair from the drawer, a gleam of half-subdued sympathy stole into her grim face and she laid a hand upon her mistress' arm. It was as near a caress as her stoicism permitted.

"Ye ken me through an' through, ma'am," she began in a low voice as she fumbled with the glove buttons. "Ye ken too what I think o' women who're bent on upsettin' the universe, even the Almichty himsel', for nae reason in the warl except tae ding-dong their names in the paper. I've never confessed it but I'm wi' ye on a few p'int's, a very few, mind you. If onybody can win oot against men an' their poleetical cantrips, it's no a woman like Cornelia nor that besom Olympia but you—yersel'."

"Bless my soul, Teenie," her mistress laughed. "That is a confession from you!"

"Maybe it is somethin' o' a confession," admitted the woman slowly. A flash of tenderness leaped into her eyes. "Mind one thing, it may steady yer nerves. Ye've got somethin', I dinna ken what, somethin' that mak's

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fowk trust ye an' like ye, sometimes love ye an' gie ye yer ain w'y. That's no' aye a safe gift for a woman. I dinna ken hoo it's goin' tae work amang four hundred men, maisterful, hard-headed men, that think a woman oucht tae be hame, rockin' a cradle, year in an' year oot. It's my idea though," she concluded lamely, "that ye'll come near winnin' oot if ye dinna get yer head turned."

"Teenie." A glimmer of laughter flashed into Cynthia's face. "I could never have believed that you would flop."

"Flop," repeated the servant indignantly. "It's no floppin'. It's naethin' in the warl excep' that here an' there in every fool doctrine there's a grain or two o' truth."

When the last button was clasped Cynthia gripped the large, raw-boned, capable hand between her own.

"Teenie, do you know what you stand for to me?"

"A servant, ma'am, a servant wha fills her place as weel's she ken's how."

"A servant—" The mistress paused for a moment. "I don't know why, I scarcely think of you as a servant—you are as near a friend as I possess in the world."

"Thank you, ma'am." Although the grim woman's manner was constrained as that of a bronze statue on the Mall, Cynthia felt a sudden impulse to throw her arms around her

neck and kiss her. She desisted, remembering with what scorn Teenie regarded kissing.

Debonair came dashing into the room.

"Mother, get a move on you," he cried imperatively. "It's five minutes to eleven. Gee!" the boy rambled on while the chauffeur tucked a robe about their knees. "You don't know what I've been up against this forenoon. For two straight hours I've done nothing but stand off a bunch of ridiculous old suffs, who began to camp round the hotel at day-break. They're bound they'll have a look at you. I've headed them off so you could have your beauty sleep."

"Good boy!" laughed his mother.

"Listen, you owe me some cash! I've tipped every servant here, black and white. And the stories we've told! You were down with a sick headache, you'd lost your voice, you'd gone shopping, one bell boy sent you off to Mt. Vernon before breakfast to pay your respects at the tomb of George Washington; that impressed the suffs as a great patriotic thought."

"These foolish suffragists are going to be the plague of my life."

"Great Scott, Mother, don't you know you're their representative?"

"I certainly do," she answered with a sigh.

"Suppose," suggested the boy cheerfully, "suppose, instead of sending me to college, you put me on a salary, a nice, fat, juicy salary, to

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head off suffs for you? I can do it. I wish you could have had a tintype of me beaung two of them around this morning."

"Beaung them around!" A smile twitched his mother's lips.

"Yes, I'll show you their pictures." He dug down into an overcoat pocket. "Autographed too! They're twins, Dillie and Dollie Tilp, classy name, ain't it? They're dressed alike, down to white spats over their patent leathers. They carried swagger little black canes and had done something—I can't tell what—to their thirty-nine-cent suff hats which made them look as nifty as—"

"What did they want?"

"You! That's all any of them want. When I told them I was your son I had the ovation of my life."

"Debonair, you go to college next week."

"Mother, you can never be so cruel!"

"What do the Tilps know about suffrage?"

"They had things down pat. They talked about universal sisterhood and their down-trodden sex and pioneers of progress and the emancipation of women, and they're as cunning as a pair of chickadees only they know as much about life—real life I mean—as—" concluded Debonair lamely "as—chickadees."

"Son, I sometimes wish," mused Cynthia gravely, "that I were going into this business footloose."

"Footloose!" repeated the boy. "What do you mean?"

"I'll be constantly hobbled by misguided women, who imagine the world can be made over in a month. If I worked hard and put my whole heart in it, I might achieve something, only they—"

"I know what you mean," interrupted the boy. "Most of these freaks are different from Jane Hagner or Auntie Schaffer. This morning I'd have liked to stand the whole bunch on its respected head! One of them told me she was an unleashed dynamo of rabid human energy. What do you make of that?"

"And—the chickadees?"

"Oh, the chickadees!" Debonair laughed lightly. "You should hear them tell about how they campaigned for you."

"What, they came from Oklahoma?"

"Straight from the red dirt. They toured your district with bags strapped across their shoulders, made speeches and nailed 'Vote for Cynthia Pike' on every tree and fence they passed. The chickadees are—larks!"

They threaded their way down Pennsylvania Avenue through mobs of pedestrians and vehicles which seemed to have one common Mecca, the gleaming, gray-domed edifice which lifted itself stalwartly against the blue sky at the end of the wide street.

While they waited their turn under the fa-

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cade of the House carriages rolled up, depositing fashionably dressed women and brisk men, who glanced about carelessly as if the scene were an everyday episode. Motley throngs, that sauntered about the corridors, turned eager eyes on every passerby as if searching for faces which the press of the country had made common property.

"Wait a moment, Deb," whispered his mother while they paused beside a pillar in Statuary Hall. A group of women decked with suffrage badges stared meditatively at the still, white face of Frances Willard.

"To think," remarked a flippant girl, "that there should be only one woman—one—among all these pedestaled stiffs!"

"Stiffs!" reproved a grim faced matron. "Here's Collamer from our own State. Don't let me hear you say a thing like that again, Penelope."

"I've got nothing against Collamer,"—the girl shrugged her shoulders,—"except that I never heard of him before. What I'm thinking of is the justice to our sex, to be represented here by one woman!"

"Don't worry, Pen," observed a muscular female beside her. "Twenty years hence it will be different. The whole trend of life proves it. Why are we here today? To view the entering of a wedge which will slowly but surely raise our sex to the pinnacle it deserves. Be-

fore you reach my age some of these insensate old marbles will be relegated to the background, while Cynthia Pike, the pioneer of our cause, will loom out whitely like—”

“Debonair,” whispered his mother as she pulled her veil about her face, “let us get to the House chamber. These women may accost us.” She hesitated as they turned away. “Here come more of them. Where can we go, Deb?”

“Try this corridor,” suggested the boy. “It may lead to an elevator. I’ve seen elevators marked ‘For the use of Members only’; we ought to be safe in one of them. Blair should be here. He could head off these women; the one who wants you statued is equal to wrapping you in the Stars and Stripes and carrying you out on the floor of the House.”

“Hush, Deb. I’m nervous enough now.”

Cynthia drew a breath of relief when they reached a corridor which was deserted except for a knot of men, who stood near an open door talking earnestly.

“Debonair, get some one to pilot us to the floor of the House. I’ll stay here till you return.”

She fixed her eyes on a misty silhouette of the gray and red city, listening heedlessly to a conversation which floated toward her. She realized that the group beside her were future colleagues, when they greeted a tall, slender

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man, who stepped briskly from an adjacent room.

"I'm glad to see you, lad," cried a ponderous hulk of a statesman with a cheerful, ruddy face. "Have you just come to town?"

"Yes, I got in this morning." The voice of the young man was singularly clear and vibrant. "You're looking ten years younger, Brebner, and actually radiant."

"Thank you, Boy, you are kinder than my mirror. Only you're a flatterer, sir, a sad flatterer."

"Not a bit of it."

The younger man laughed gaily. Cynthia glanced at him over her shoulder. His laugh was as pleasant as his voice.

"I spent an hour before the mirror this morning trying to look radiant," confessed Brebner.

"Why?"

"Bless my soul, Stephen,"—Brebner slapped the young congressman vociferously on the shoulder,—“you—who hail from old Virginia, the most chivalrous State in the Union—to ask why! Do you forget that the House welcomes a lady into its ranks today, a lady whom they tell me, sir, is loveliness and charm personified?"

"I had not forgotten," confessed the young congressman, "only—"

"Only—you did not waste time before a mir-

ror except to congratulate yourself. With your beauty and blandishments, you, the winsome bachelor of the House, have me lashed to the mast, me with a girth like a yearly percheron, and a bald dome and—”

The man from Virginia laughed.

“I would gladly exchange domes if I could bargain for the brains inside it. Only, each of us is safe from heart-break, no ‘Votes for women’ lady would waste a moment upon mere men.”

“If she should, what would you, the flower of Virginia chivalry, feel it your duty to do?” persisted the older man.

“I think,” confessed Stephen with quiet deliberation, “I would consider it my first duty to see that the lady got the best seat in the House.”

“And the second?”

“That I got the seat next to her.”

The red blood flushed into Cynthia’s face as she turned to meet Debonair, who came hurrying through the corridor accompanied by a colored man.

“We’ve got to sprint,” said the boy. “It’s a quarter to twelve.”

They paused, as they turned a corner of the lobby, which led to the cloakroom. Ahead of them surged a crowd of excited women waving yellow flags and filling the halls with a shrill babble.

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"Mother, it's the suffs," whispered Debonair. "We're discovered! Here come the chickadees!"

Cynthia waited as one does for an incoming wave to break. The body of women surged forward with one impetuous rush. They whipped the air with their yellow banners and cheered, wildly oblivious to curious-eyed men and women who waited for something to happen, something quite unlike the dignified opening of a new congress.

"Mother!" Debonair swung himself in front of her. "I'll try and head them off. These blamed chickadees started the stampede."

"Yes, son, I recognize them." She laughed nervously.

In advance of the hysterical bevy of women came the Tilp twins, stretching between them an orange silk banner which bore in black letters, "At last—Votes for Women."

The mob, as if in one voice, burst into song.

"Oklahoma, Oklahoma,
Right gaily we strike
Our lyre to do honor
To Cynthia Pike.
She will uphold us,
And forward we'll hike
To nation-wide victory
With Cynthia Pike."

Some women sang the doggerel with slow, solemn earnestness, as if it had been a psalm, others shrieked the words exultantly, and an echo of the lofty halls sent the discord booming back upon them.

Cynthia moved backward step by step until she reached a window, which looked out on the green terrace. For one instant she felt a mad impulse to raise the sash and leap out. Instead she lifted her veil and waited.

The crowd moved slowly as people do, who are panic-stricken. By-standers were caught up and carried along in the rush. Once she heard a shriek of terror and pain. Policemen and ushers rushed from all directions but they were tossed aside like the debris which impedes a flood. From the cloakroom came statesmen waving their arms and expostulating frantically. Cynthia saw a tall, gaunt congressman come loping through the corridor while he swept a silk hat in long circles above his head.

"Ladies, ladies," he called in a stentorian voice; "desist, this is no fitting scene for the House of Representatives."

He laid his hand upon the arm of an Amazon near him. With her flag-staff she tossed the hat from his hand. He flung up his arms in despair, while it whirled into the riotous mob and was trodden underfoot. Cynthia heard a low, guttural laugh beside her; it was the young negro who had piloted them through the corri-

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dor. His eyes protruded in excitement and his teeth gleamed in a wide grin.

"The Lawd save us!" he murmured.

Escape was an impossibility, for a hundred hands were stretching out to her. Debonair tried to speak; she could see his lips move but a single voice was lost in the uproar.

Suddenly the hands before her paused as if arrested and a hush fell upon the crowd. The hat-wrecking woman snapped her banner like a whip and called for silence.

The Tilp twins began in a shrill soprano:

"It's come at last—our victory day,
The day of all the ages.
The day we've prayed and waited for,
The day foreseen by sages.
The day which ushers in the dawn
When we poor hunted deer
Can rise above the thrall of sex
And read our title clear."

"That abomination, sisters, the thrall of sex," began the Amazon, "has hung like a millstone about our necks since our first mother bowed the knee to Adam. Today we emerge from the tyranny of man and the yoke of ancient days. We have been repudiated, trampled under foot, set at naught, tossed to the winds, scorned and plucked up by the roots! Man—petty man—has had the monopoly of power; it is soon to be wrested from his grasp.

We, the women of a new century, entering at last the portals which have been closed against us, are no longer the timid, hunted deer, no longer the victims of a cutthroat monopoly. Today when the Congress of the United States convenes, it seats enthroned in its midst a woman empowered to battle for us, to—”

“But, ladies—”

Cynthia lifted her eyes with a gasp of astonishment. Behind her on the window-sill stood the young Virginian. For one moment, as his eyes met hers, a gleam of laughter leaped into them. Then he turned to the excited crowd.

“Ladies,” he repeated. “Allow me to speak for the Representatives of the United States. It is twelve o’clock. In the body of the House they are waiting to accord the new Congresswoman such honor as is due the first lady who enters our councils. Pardon me if I take her away from you.”

He stepped from the sill and drew Cynthia’s arm inside his own. She felt an agonizing inclination to laugh as they moved through a narrow lane, which opened through the applauding mob.

When they passed the cloakroom door she dropped the man’s arm.

“I might have been literally torn to pieces if you hadn’t come to my rescue,” she confessed.

“Draw a long breath,” he advised, “then

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forgive me for carrying you off in the high-handed fashion I did."

"Forgive you! Why, I cannot voice my gratitude."

"You were honored, singularly honored."

"I suppose,"—Cynthia laughed, while she pulled out her side-combs and began to pin up her hair,—"*it was* meant for an ovation."

"No masculine Representative, so far as I know," explained the Virginian gravely, "ever brought such a following to the House."

"You don't imagine for a moment," asked Cynthia, "that I enjoy this sort of thing?"

"Most people do. Listen."

He pointed to the lobby. The suffragists were trying to force an entrance into the cloak-room past the policemen and doorkeepers. They heard the chorus of protesting voices.

"Do you suppose," asked Cynthia with a fleeting glance of terror, "that one woman, a woman who is a trifle more ignorant than the average, can live up to their expectations?"

"I don't know," confessed the young Representative. "Years ago, one lone Socialist came here. Later he was defeated, he had not achieved an iota of legislation. We must get around in front; they will draw for seats in a few minutes."

"Will you stay near me?" began Cynthia nervously. "It's awful to feel like a nobody in this crowd."

"Consider me your bodyguard until I am dismissed." The Virginian bowed suavely. "Only you are very far from being a nobody. People may fall over the front of the galleries today trying to catch a glimpse of you. Forgive me, I have not introduced myself, we became acquainted in such a haphazard fashion. Of course, I know who you are. My name is Stephen Cabot; I represent the eleventh district of Virginia."

A wrinkle of perplexity lined Cynthia's brow.

"I have heard your name before."

"Thank you." Cabot laughed. "I feel flattered to know my name has penetrated as far as Oklahoma. Although this is my third term in the House my laurels are still to win. I must tell you," he explained, while they hurried through the cloakroom, "Brebner of New York has put through his plan and you are to be specially honored."

"How?"

"We masculine nondescripts draw for seats and take the best that luck hands out. You are to skip that ceremony and have first choice."

"Oh," cried Cynthia, "I wish they wouldn't do that. I would rather take my chance with the rest."

"It is a mere matter of courtesy."

Cynthia's entrance to the House of Representatives was dramatic. Every paper in the country conceded that fact, as it conceded in a

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half-bewildered way the fact that she possessed grace, beauty and superb self-possession.

She hesitated for a moment, when an old man with snowy hair and fine, old-world dignity came forward to offer her his arm.

"As an ex-speaker of the House, madame," he explained genially, "I have the privilege of taking my seat without waiting to draw. The same courtesy is offered to you, as the first woman we welcome to our councils. May I have the honor of escorting you to a chair?"

It was many minutes, so it seemed to Cynthia, before the demonstration in the galleries ceased. Men as well as women rose to their feet, fluttering yellow flags and waving handkerchiefs. She heard her name shouted; once a piping voice burst into song. The singer stopped abruptly as the Speaker swept the galleries with a fierce glance and struck his gavel an irritated blow, demanding "Order in the House."

One congressman after another, when his name was called, came briskly down the aisle, pausing occasionally over the choice of a desk. Cynthia's eyes were fixed on the venerable old face of the Speaker, who gazed down on a drama which had grown familiar to him. That scene became imprinted on some inner film of her brain; the gray head of the man in the chair silhouetted majestically against the red, white and blue of a flag behind him, the calm majesty of

Washington and Jefferson looming from their tarnished frames, while below on the marble steps crouched a group of page boys. Once, during a silent moment, she heard the tick of a great clock under the press gallery where a knot of men watched proceedings in tense quiet.

A voice waked her from the reverie. As she glanced up her face grew hot. It was Stephen Cabot.

"I am a lucky beggar," he confessed, while he smiled down into her eyes. "I imagined this seat would be preëmpted long ago. Do you mind if I become your neighbor?"

"No." The flush burned in Cynthia's cheek. "I feel reconciled to my duties already if I have a friend beside me."

"Thank you," said Cabot quietly.

When the House adjourned, he rose to escort her down the aisle.

"Let me be your cavalier for today," he begged. "The suffragists may line up and give you another ovation, besides the newspaper men are lying in wait."

"Must I see them?" Cynthia paused in the crowd, which was filing out to the cloakroom.

"You'll get more space in tonight's papers than the whole four hundred and forty of us rolled into one. Take them in a bunch," he advised. "They stand ready to call you the debutante congresswoman and give you all

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manner of titles, but it will be easier to talk to them here than out in the corridor."

"I can't make a speech," pleaded Cynthia.

"Give them a sentence or two. They'll put all sorts of rot in your mouth if you don't. Then you will wish you had spoken. Here comes Frayne. He's an uncommonly good fellow and a friend of mine. Let me introduce you. What do you want to talk to the lady about, Frayne?" he asked while they paused in the doorway.

"Simply this." The keen-eyed man turned expectantly to the Congresswoman. "How did the reception the House gave you contrast with what you had anticipated?"

"I wish," she said quickly, "you would say this for me to every woman in America, whether she stands with us or not. I came here today to take my seat in Congress after a sleepless night, filled with, oh, I don't know what! I was prepared for hostility, cold looks, disdain, antipathy,—even avowed antagonism. I expected at the best nothing better than polite tolerance. Instead I found courteous deference, also such chivalry and friendliness, that I feel ashamed of the fears I had. The reception accorded me by the House of Representatives taught me one thing, that no matter what are his politics or his opinion of our cause, the American man has one quality in common, courtesy and deference to our sex. We suf-

fragists picture him as a tyrant, a coward or a jealous weakling. If I had held such views, the right hand of fellowship given me today would have conquered instantly. It was not mere gallantry I met, it was the innate courtesy a good man offers to his mother, his sister or his wife. It was the courtesy I would have my son show to every woman. If we are to achieve the reforms our platform stands for, it cannot be done by sex antagonism but by working hand in hand with men, who have made the United States a power in the world, and who have already given to our sex more privileges than any other nation accords to its women."

CHAPTER XXI

JANE HAGNER IN WASHINGTON

"MOTHER, I suppose you've thought it all out?" asked Debonair abruptly.

"What, son?"

"How Jane Hagner is going to fit in here."

Cynthia did not answer. She appeared intent on buttering a hot muffin.

"Bradshaw," she said imperiously to the solemn-faced butler, who stood behind her chair, "pour me another cup of coffee."

Debonair watched his mother with a thrill of admiration. When they were alone she threw off the oppressive yoke of living up to their new environment but before the retinue of impassive, superlatively trained servants she carried herself with so superb a dignity that occasionally he envied her. It was a pose which his youthful exuberance found hard to sustain.

When Bradshaw left the room, carrying his silver tray with stately dignity, she turned to the boy with a twinkle in her eye.

"You're bully, Mother," he whispered, "perfectly bully. When it comes to letting down the bars before an ossified Begum like that,

you're right on to your job." He pointed at the back of the retreating Bradshaw.

"It is not easy to do, son." Cynthia sighed. "It's like wearing a high collar all the time, still it does not come so hard as it did at first."

"I was talking about Jane Hagner," he said, flitting back to the conversation they had broken off.

"Yes, I know," she assented. "You are wondering how she will live up to Bradshaw and Chatfield and the rest of them. If she can't, they will have to make the best of it. That is what I am paying them big wages to do." A smile flickered across her face. "She may carry herself to the manner born; you can never tell what Jane Hagner will do."

"Don't you think so for one minute, Mother." The boy spoke gloomily. "She's more likely to cut loose and do any crazy thing. Besides, when we're just beginning to break in, it looks to me like social suicide."

"We'll run the risk just the same, Deb. I was never so glad in my life as yesterday when I opened the letter which told she had started. Jane will feel like a breath of fresh air. You don't know, Sonnie, how tired I get of this sort of thing even if we have only been here for three weeks."

"It's bully, Mother; it's living at last."

Cynthia had wearied speedily of hotel life and gone house-hunting early in December.

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The third place she entered was an Italian palace on Sixteenth Street which had been designed for the home of a European embassy. She had followed hard on the heels of one enthusiastic foreigner, who queried in an awe-struck tone the figure set upon pink marble walls and gold furniture. After a swift translation of American dollars into francs he turned away ruefully.

"It eez not for us," he confessed. "Our Government eez leeberal, very leeberal, but this—it waits for some—many, many meelionaire from a gold State of your wide West."

Cynthia, with the delighted Debonair at her heels, made one tour of the wonderful place, then leased it for the term and ordered the agent to find her necessary servants.

"A home like this demands French or English servants," the man explained. "Nothing else would fit in."

"Get me French or English servants then."

"You will want a large retinue of them and in this city foreign servants come high."

"I have not demurred about the price." There was an arrogant tone in Mrs. Pike's voice. "Simply see to it, please, that there are enough of them and that they know their business. I have no time to give housekeeping a thought."

A week later, they moved into a home where

the wheels ran as noiselessly as in a sumptuous hotel.

"I'll be glad to have Jane Hagner here if for nothing but to make a third at the table," confessed the Congresswoman. "You and I are lost in this great banqueting hall, Deb. It's big enough to seat three generations of a prolific family."

"I feel that way myself," said the boy slowly. "It's actually spooky after the lights are turned low. Last night when I came in from the theater the big clock in the hall struck twelve, and up there in a shadowy corner of the gallery, I could have sworn I saw a ghost move around. I started to run, then I switched on the electricity. It was that blamed, old tapestry flapping, a window had been left open somewhere. I would rather eat every meal in the little breakfast room. It's cheerful; this isn't."

"I thought of that and spoke to Bradshaw about it yesterday. He looked at me in perfect horror. 'Madame,' he said, 'that would be very bad form. You might eat a luncheon there occasionally, but no well-regulated butler would consent to serve dinner in a breakfast room, madame.' "

"So you gave up?"

Cynthia laughed, "I could not contradict Bradshaw, son. He knows."

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"Blast Bradshaw! Can't we occasionally do what we want to in our own house?"

"There are certain things, Sonnie, we have got to be educated up to."

"Well, it's time to go and meet Jane Hagner. We've got to do some educating of her."

While they stood in the big station watching a mob surge out from an incoming train, Cynthia's face grew radiant as she singled out one sturdy figure, which pushed through the crowd.

"It's Jane Hagner all over, isn't it?" groaned Debonair. "Buried to the nose in paper bundles and boxes and grips and her hat cocked over one eye. What on earth will Alphonse say when we hand over that junk to him? Look, she's shooin' off a porter; won't let him touch her things. What do you suppose she has brought?"

"Goodness knows." His mother's lips twitched. "Don't worry about her, Sonnie."

Cynthia moved forward to greet the old woman, whose keen eyes peered eagerly through her spectacles. She put her arms about her, drew her quickly from the throng and stared down at her with a radiant face. A wrinkle gathered between Debonair's eyebrows.

"For the land's sake, Deb Pike!" Jane Hagner dropped her bundles and laid a hand upon the boy's shoulder. "I wouldn't have knowed you, you've smartened up so! You're the very spit of the swell chaps in a clothing catalog

that some Philadelphia store sends Reub. As for you," she turned quickly to Cynthia, "you hain't gone off none in your looks either that I see."

The Congresswoman looked at her through misty eyes. She had never dreamed she could feel so homesickly grateful to see any one from Oklahoma. She had imagined she had hated its very soil.

"Here, young man,"—Jane Hagner turned aside from them hastily,—"you let them things alone. That's no property of yours."

"This is our footman, Mrs. Hagner," explained Debonair quickly; "he'll carry your things to the car."

"Oh, it is? You'll have to excuse me, I might have guessed. I've seen pictures of chaps like him in tight knee-breeches. When it comes to real cold weather I should think it would get sort of chilly for his calves. See here, young man, you take extra good care of that green box. I brought along some spiced peaches and watermelon pickle," she explained as she turned to Cynthia. "I didn't dare put them in my trunk. If they'd get to leaking, the land knows what damage they would have done."

"Thank you, now come," said Cynthia; "we can't stand here and visit."

The city, all white and red with dashes of slate-blue or gray and the misty brown of naked trees, lay in a dazzle of mild winter sun-

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shine. Jane Hagner grew silent. The luxurious car sped noiselessly up a steep hill, passed houses which looked like gay Venetian palaces lifted from the edge of an old lagoon and set on the crown of a brand-new, sunlit city.

"Seems to me," she observed, "we're heading for a pretty expensive part of the town."

"You're right," acquiesced Debonair; "and Mother's got the most expensive lot in the entire ranch. Here it is."

"Before you go in, Mrs. Hagner," suggested the boy, while he helped her to descend, "take a look straight down town. The rent mother pays isn't for a house altogether, the view costs money."

"I should reckon it would," she acquiesced, "for it's considerable of a view." She stood speechless for a minute, gazing down a long hill, which made a sudden dip then crossed a level between palatial residences, tall spired churches and lofty apartment houses. It was a hilltop of splendid silence, for a stream of swift vehicles swept noiselessly over the shining asphalt. Opposite loomed a high, gashed bank which glowed with wide splashes of yellow ochre and dull Indian red. Up and down the face of it men with picks and shovels looked like a myriad of slowly moving ants. It betokened the magnificent future of the crown of a city.

"The street looks to me as if it ended at the

foot of the hill," said the old woman, while she peered down with one hand roofing her eyes from the glare of sunshine.

"It does end there," acquiesced Cynthia. "That gleam through the bare trees is the White House. You can drive straight down to its door. This street is called the Avenue of the Presidents."

"It sort o' takes your breath away after Oklahoma."

"Well, rather! I hate to go," confessed Cynthia, as she glanced at her watch, "only I must be at the House within half an hour. I have an engagement with a man. First, I will take you upstairs and leave you with Teenie. She will seem like a bit from home, even if in the old days you did not love each other. I will get back as early as I can."

Jane Hagner drew a quick breath of astonishment when the bronze doors swung apart, and she followed Cynthia through a lofty hall where a line of servants stood as if to do them silent obeisance.

Glints of red and violet and blue shimmered through a stained-glass window and fell upon a pallid marble Venus which guarded the foot of the wide stairs. A wood fire crackled on the hearth. Above rose a mantel, that seemed to lose itself somewhere among the shadows of a lofty, oak ceiling. Wonderful paintings glowed here and there on the dim walls and the

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rugs under her feet felt like depths of velvet. As Jane Hagner followed a footman up the white stairs, the vivid green of her cherished box and an outburst of brown pasteboard straggling from its broken lid looked like an incongruous blotch of color against the sumptuous magnificence.

Teenie, clad in blue gingham and a white apron, met her at the head of the stair. If there had ever been a smart of jealousy or hard feeling between the two women, it melted away the instant their hands clasped, although a grim smile was the only welcome offered her by the Scotch servant. Cynthia put her arms about her while she said good-by, and the old woman felt a subtle change, she could not tell what, it might have been nothing but a perfume of drooping violets or the faint odor from warmed chinchilla, still she drew a long sigh of relief when she was left alone with the servant.

"Tak' off your things an' mak' yoursel' comfortable," invited Teenie, as she threw open a door at the head of the stair. "This is where you sleep, your sitting room and bath-room's in there."

"For the land's sake," cried Jane Hagner as she caught sight of a gleam of silver and onyx and mirrors through the open door, "I wan't looking for a tenement; a bedroom was space enough for me."

"You might as well tak' it," Teenie smiled grimly. "We're no' scrimped for room here. There's space enough to hoose a regiment o' sodgers under this roof."

"What a view!" She moved across to a window which led out upon a balcony of carved stone. Teenie stood beside her. The city glowed like a pearl-lined shell against a blue sky where pale golden clouds floated. The thin shaft of the Monument lifted itself sharply through the clear air and the Potomac wound like a silvered ribbon between brown shores. In the farther distance rose the vaporous purple of Maryland's low hills.

"It's a queer change from the red dirt country," mused the old woman.

"It is that." There was a brisk note of decision in the servant's voice.

"It seems to me you ought to be comfortable and happy here."

"I ought tae. I ken that."

"Aren't you?" Jane Hagner turned quickly to look into the steady eyes beside her.

The Scotchwoman did not answer for a second. "My grandmither," she began irrelevantly, "used tae tell about a wee brown hen that strayed into a peacock yard an' had nae company but the peacocks. She kept steppin' on their tails. They didna think muckle o' her voice or her feathers or her gait or onything else aboot her. At last she—"

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Jane Hagner laughed and laid her hand sympathetically upon the woman's arm.

"What about your mistress and Debonair? How do they take to the peacocks?"

"So far's I can see they're happy enough the noo. I'll ring for a cup o' tea. You'll drink it, won't you?"

"Drink it!" repeated Jane Hagner. "I'm hungry and thirsty for a cup o' tea. Tell them to bring a slice of bread an' butter with it."

"I'm sorry," confessed Teenie, "that I canna gang tae the kitchen an' steep it for you mysel'. There's a French man doon there. Poosette, they call him."

"You and he don't hitch?"

"Hitch," repeated Teenie scornfully; "silly gowk, he gabbles awa in his fule tongue, palaverin' and bowin' an' scrapin'. They a' do that; the last one o' them then grin at me when my back's turned or mock my tongue or my gait. They ken I'm close to Mistress Pike, it's curryin' favor, that's a' there is in it."

"They wouldn't try if they knew you as well as I do."

Teenie moved away to answer a knock at the door and lifted a tray from the hands of a smart maid.

"How many servants do they keep here?" asked Jane Hagner, while she tucked a napkin comfortably under her chin.

"Fifteen."

"Fifteen!" repeated the old woman and she set her cup back in its saucer. "Fifteen servants to look after two people!"

Teenie nodded stolidly.

"For the land's sake! Their chief job, I reckon 's to stand around an' show off their calves!"

"That's aboot a' there is for the men tae do." A whimsical smile wrinkled Teenie's face.

"Men!" repeated Jane Hagner scornfully. "If I was as rich as old Abraham I wouldn't feel I was gettin' the worth of my money in a herd o' human statuary ornamentin' my front hall."

"They say," began Teenie disdainfully, "that if you are onybody, you've got tae keep them roon', as you do the white marble lady at the fit o' the stair, just for the look o' things. Next week there's more than a servant comin'."

"Who?"

"What's called a social secretary."

"What's she to do?"

"As near as I can mak' oot, she's to run Mistress Pike and Debonair into the front o' things."

"Whose idea is she?" Jane Hagner slowly doubled a filmy slice of bread and butter into sandwich fashion.

"Mrs. Archer Halmain, one of the mistress's swell new friends, advised her to engage one."

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She says you can never get anywhere without somebody to manage you."

"Manage you?" Jane Hagner sniffed. "What's the name of the manager?"

"Miss Durward-Troup."

"An' Miss Durward-Troup, I reckon, is goin' to take a hand at managin' me?"

"It's mair than likely," reflected Teenie gravely.

"I'm fairly achin' for her to start in." There was a note of delighted anticipation in the old woman's voice.

CHAPTER XXII

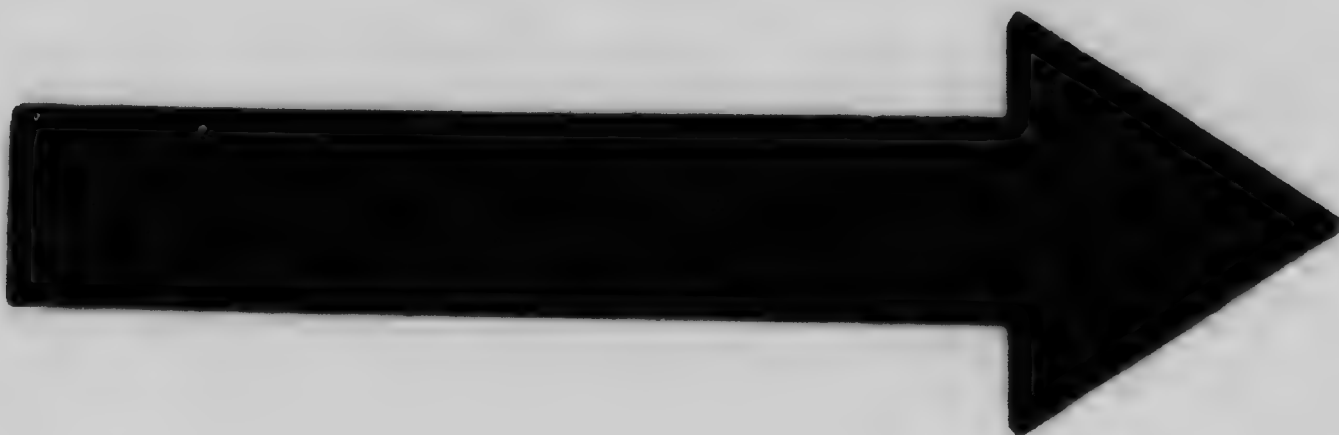
BREAKING IN

CYNTHIA'S little sitting room on the third floor of her marble palace was the cosiest retreat in the vast house. It was jogged with casement windows, which looked across the housetops to a stretch of misty, alluring landscape, where any wonderful thing might lie. In comparison to the yawning caverns downstairs, where huge logs burned, the fireplace was snug and radiant and homelike and the arms of each chair was a caress.

"You look like straight comfort," said Jane Hagner as she sat up abruptly in a low rocker.

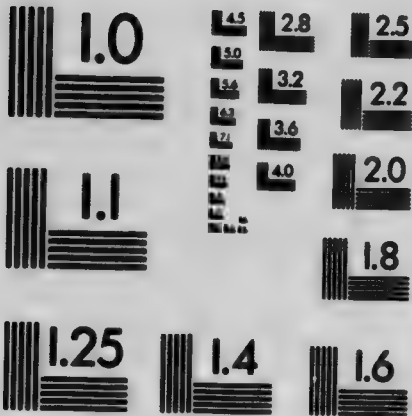
"You don't." Cynthia started to her feet. "Here, take this," she pushed a big, chintz-covered chair before the grate; "lounge out in it, then we'll talk till morning."

The old woman sank down with a sigh of satisfaction. "This is better, only loungin' is easier said than done when a woman will never see sixty-two again and weighs what I do." A smile twinkled across her face. "One night last summer when 'twas hotter 'n Tophet, Reuben an' me matched up ideas on what we hankered for in Heaven. I've forgot what he



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set his heart on; there was a pipe in it, I recollect. Mine was dropping my corsets off the edge o' a cloud, gettin' into a slinky wrapper, then paddin' round barefooted on cool marble floors of the Celestial City."

"Kick off your slippers," Cynthia laughed, "and let us imagine it is Heaven. Deb won't be in till midnight. Teenie is playing watchdog and we have nothing to do but talk."

"I don't know just where to start off," confessed Jane Hagner, "unless it's where a man does and ask, 'How's business?'"

"Business," Mrs. Pike glanced up quickly. "I suppose you mean, how are things going at the House?"

"Yes."

"You cannot understand," a weary tone crept into the woman's voice, "how it takes the heart out of one when you realize that the only people who accomplish anything have been in Congress for ages."

"Ages," repeated Mrs. Pike; "how many ages?"

"Well, the other day, Norman of Ohio said after you've been in the House sixteen, eighteen, twenty years you begin to get what you want." A look of dismay crept into Cynthia's eyes. "Think of that, will you. I'll be as old as you before I achieve anything. Women can't wait for things to happen as men do. I am impatient myself, but when they keep writ-

ing or phoning or wiring or waking me up in the middle of the night with telegrams—and they do it time and again—to know why I am not putting a bill through, it makes me frantic—perfectly frantic.”

Cynthia rose and began to pace nervously about the room.

“Set down,” advised the old woman. “Don’t stride round like a distracted panther. That don’t help none.”

“I know it does not.” The Congresswoman laughed mirthlessly and dropped back into her chair. “Tomorrow I’ll take you to the House. You’ll see Blair go through the morning mail. Read it if you want to. I hate to touch it, when it piles up as high as that—” Cynthia stretched out her hand level with her knee,—“with people asking for impossibilities, for freak bills to go through, for jobs that no woman is fitted for, or begging for money, or a presentation at court, or an appropriation for some idiotic thing, or free land, or seeds, or shrubs, or trees, or a trip abroad to study labor conditions, or prisons, or the Tariff, or—”

“Good Lord! Are there fools like that loose?”

“Are there? I cannot give you the faintest idea of what fools there are. Not one in a thousand asks for anything sensible. The sane ones don’t send me letters, I guess. I began by try-

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ing to put some of their ideas into bills and dropped them in the basket. That basket is a tomb."

"You never hear tell of them again?" questioned the old woman bluntly.

"Never. Yes, one was reported out favorably last week. Just one! It may go through. If it does," she concluded, "it will be because the House thought it funny."

"What was it?"

"A party of D. A. Rs. besieged me one day," Cynthia smiled reminiscently. "They wanted the portraits of the President's wives brought up from the cellar and hung in the upper part of the White House side by side with their husbands."

"For Heaven's sake, you don't mean to say they're stowed away in a cellar?"

"No, not in the cellar exactly. They are in a basement where they store old china and other relics. It does not seem very respectful to the memory of the ladies. My bill was reported on favorably. It may pass from pure chivalry. I was not on the floor when it was read; they tell me the men howled over it. Perhaps the President will veto. Some of the ladies are frights; I should not want them hung around my living room."

"They probably were not so bad as they were painted."

"Few of us are," said Cynthia bitterly. "I

know! Before I came here an editor of a Michigan paper announced that he 'intended to pound hell out of me,' these were his very words. He has been doing it now for weeks."

"Yes, I know," acquiesced Jane Hagner.

"You do?" questioned the Congresswoman.

"The stuff's bein' copied here an' there through the district in papers that ain't very friendly to us."

"Then you have seen what I am accused of?" Cynthia shrugged her shoulders. "Fraud and graft and incompetence and highhandedness and bribing. There is only one thing I confess to; that is, incompetence. The man gets so bitter and cruel and malicious that I wonder—" she paused and looked at the woman beside her.

"You wonder," continued Jane Hagner calmly, "just as Reuben an' me an' somebody else did, if Burke Beverly ain't mixed up in it."

"I had not imagined any one but myself would suspect such a thing."

"They've done more'n suspect. It's got to be a fixed idea with William McCroy. Last month he nosed round for a week up there in Michigan."

"Did you send him?" asked Mrs. Pike suddenly.

"I did not. Reuben and me had no more idea he was chewing on the same notion than you

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had. One night about dusk he stepped in, he an' that critter Shameless. They'd both been to Michigan. He didn't find out a thing. Burke Beverly an' Olympia might have dropped off the edge o' creation for all that can be heard o' them. McCroy allows he's never been near Michigan so far's can be found out. There's nothin' to that skunk o' an editor but general cussedness."

"Why should McCroy have gone on such an errand—for me?" Cynthia's eyes were bent upon the glowing coals.

"That's stumped us. He's as queer as all get out. I used to think there was a downright crazy streak in him."

"Have you changed your mind?" asked the Congresswoman.

"Not altogether," answered Jane Hagner brusquely, "only I've seed other streaks. He's as faithful's a dog an' believes in folks he makes up his mind about. Nothing would change his opinion o' them except something they did themselves."

"Were you trying to change his opinion?"

"No, I wan't wastin' breath nor muscle."

"Did you want to change his opinion of somebody—I mean—did you—"

"I know what you mean."

"Who was it?" persisted Cynthia.

"You," answered the old woman abruptly. Cynthia laid her hands upon her burning

cheeks. "You do not believe then that I deserve the faith he has in me?"

" 'Tain't that exactly. He don't belong in your life—this sort of life, I mean—any more'n I do."

"Why did you decide so suddenly to come here?"

"Because Reuben an' McCroy an' me made up our minds you needed somebody here from home."

"I do need you," answered the woman in a quavering voice. "I have Deb, only the life here is going to Deb's head. Blair's as good as gold, and there's Teenie. But I need a woman." She rose and knelt by Jane Hagner's side. "You're not old enough to be my mother, still there's something about you that one wants in a mother, something strong and true and real. That's what you don't find in women here. They are not real. I need you terribly."

"I'm glad you do," agreed the old woman with a flashing smile. "I felt some way as if you did. I'm goin' to stay all winter, if I'm invited. You can call on me occasionally to read a lecture to your fool female constituents that they won't forget. When you don't want me, set me off in a corner. I've brought knit-tin' enough along to—"

"Set you in a corner!" flared Cynthia. "In the first place, how long would you stay in a

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corner? I'm going to make you the rage in Washington. I mean—"

"You mean with the permission of Miss Durward-Troup."

"Miss Durward-Troup?" The Congresswoman rose to her feet. "Who told you about Miss Durward-Troup?"

"Teenie did."

"What did she say?"

"Nothin' except that she's comin' here as your social secretary."

"Was that all?"

"Yes, every word."

"How does Teenie," she asked eagerly, "feel about her? I have been so busy I had no chance to talk it over."

"I don't imagine," answered the old woman coolly, "that Teenie's layin' awake nights worryin' about it. Teenie can take care of herself."

"Of course, she can. Only," said Mrs. Pike suddenly, "Miss Troup is not going to turn this house upside down. She will take care of things here that I ought to do and can't. She knows the ropes. I don't. Nobody can succeed in Washington unless they look after the social end of life as carefully as the political. Every one tells me that."

Jane Hagner nodded. "You like her?" she asked.

"Who?"

"Miss Durward-Troup."

"She has wonderful self-possession and charming manners and is beautiful—"

"I suppose that's necessary in a social secretary!"

"That is not all. She has lived here for years; she knows everybody, who is worth knowing. Besides she is an ardent suffragist."

"Then why on earth," queried the old woman brutally, "does she want to work? I suppose she is working for wages?"

"Of course." A smile crept round Cynthia's mouth. "She asks very handsome wages. During the last administration she was secretary to a cabinet officer's wife; last season she was with Mrs. Cornwell Franklin; then the Admiral died and his wife left town."

"I never heard of the Admiral before," confessed Mrs. Hagner bluntly.

"Miss Troup's father was an English diplomat in his younger days. He does something diplomatic now; I suppose it brings him a very small salary. They live in a little apartment. He is an old aristocrat with a beautiful clear-cut face, snow-white hair and perfectly exquisite manners."

"I shouldn't think he'd allow his daughter to work out," said Jane Hagner.

"It is not working out." There was an impatient tone in Cynthia's voice. She felt the older woman's antagonism. "He said he

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looked on her coming here as a maid of honor goes to the queen."

"For mercy's sake, don't get off that queen talk to anybody but me. If a speech like that got whispered round Oklahoma, it would cook your goose. The Southwest won't stand for royalty business."

"I had not thought of that," mused Cynthia.

"Well, it's worth thinkin' of an' if I was you I wouldn't mention a social secretary to folks down home. Now tell me about your Miss Durward-Troup. I've got to see more or less of her, I expect. What's her job exactly?"

"Don't say job to her," protested Cynthia. "She is to run the social end of life for me; receive callers on Tuesdays when I cannot get home from the House, answer invitations and send them out, look after my engagements and correspondence, and so that I wear the right gowns and jewels at certain affairs. I went to luncheon at the Vice-President's one day without a hat. I was the only bareheaded woman there."

"I suppose that was a bad break."

"So bad it got into the papers."

"You say she's good lookin'?"

"Yes, beautiful and graceful and she dresses wonderfully."

"Aren't you worried about Deb?"

"Deb?" repeated his mother perplexedly.

"Deb might fall in love with her."

"Nonsense," Cynthia laughed. "Deb is a youngster. She is ten years older than Deb. There is no use worrying about things like that."

"Perhaps there ain't," acquiesced the old woman doubtfully.

CHAPTER XXIII

STEPHEN CABOT

BEFORE she went to bed that night Cynthia gazed across the city where a myriad crystal lights stood out against the deep blue darkness. After she laid her head upon the pillow, one glimmer haunted her; a steady, white beacon burning over the dome of the Capitol. It hung out the signal of a late session from which she had absconded. She saw a vision of her colleagues hard at work in committee rooms or wandering out to the floor of the House where a handful of men sat behind littered desks.

Cynthia was not gifted with a vivid imagination and worries usually lay light upon her shoulders, still during a few weeks in Congress she had come to realize that neither chivalry nor admiration were strong enough levers to move the wheels of legislation. Effort, ambition, wealth and personal attraction, upon which she had relied as a last resort, seemed futile things. Day after day she saw failure assail big, strong, brainy men, who had already won fame and knew every step of the way.

She had seen bills, on which they had labored session after session, tossed ignominiously into the scrap-heap, then watched them gather their forces together ready to begin again where they had started years before.

In the rush of political life her own impotence faced her unpleasantly more than once. At night, with her eyes focused upon the darkness and her mind dealing mercilessly with stern realities, she began to weigh and scrutinize life as she had never done it before. She had felt Jane Hagner's keen eyes pierce every filmy disguise, and the little, useless fripperies which were crowding into her life. Washington demanded fripperies and assumed smiles, ridiculous little airs and graces and small falsehoods. She was learning how to don them with odd facility and even how to wear them gracefully; but the old woman had tossed them aside as if they had been the ridiculous hauteur of a silly child.

When she awoke, the sun was high in the heavens. She ate breakfast in a rush and said her good-bys with the haste of a flurried business man.

"I hate to leave you alone all day," she confessed. Jane Hagner stood beside her in the lofty hall while Alphonse helped her into a fur coat. "It seems absolutely inhospitable and yet I've got to be on hand for a committee meeting before eleven o'clock."

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"Don't give me one thought," protested the old woman, "exceptin' to remember how happy an' comfortable I'm goin' to be. I want more'n one day to rest up. Them cars about jolted the daylights out o' me. I hain't unpacked yet either, and I've the house to go through. My soul, there's some sightseein' to do right indoors."

"Deb can take you out," suggested Cynthia. She glanced sternly into the eyes of the boy as she felt his restraining grip upon her arm.

"You let me alone for twenty-four hours. I shouldn't be one mite sorry if you make it forty-eight. I've got to git accustomed to your way o' livin' before I do one blessed thing. Besides, Reub'll want a long letter."

"Tonight," continued Cynthia hurriedly, "there is a reception at the White House—the first one of the season. If I had known ten days ago you were coming I might have got a card for you."

"I shouldn't have gone one step if you had," said the old woman decisively. "I want to do some wadin' before I start to swim. You don't suppose I mean to shame you right off the bat?"

"Shame us!" cried the Congresswoman impulsively, while she leaned forward to kiss her; "I shall feel mighty proud when I introduce you to the President."

"You hike along, you'll be late. I'm goin' to spruce up a bit before that happens."

"Jane Hagner's right," observed Debonair as their car slid out from under the stately porte-cochere. "She is liable to shame us. She looks greener up here than she did at home."

"Son." The boy met a glance in his mother's eyes which was seldom leveled on him. "Don't say things like that—to me, and what is more, don't think them. I threshed out the whole situation with myself before I went to sleep. Jane Hagner will do us proud before the season is past."

"I'm glad you think so." Debonair laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps Miss Durward-Troup can give us a hand at making Auntie Hagner over."

"There is a possibility,"—Cynthia spoke slowly while she buttoned up her coat,—"that Jane Hagner can make Miss Durward-Troup over. Now, Sonnie, what is your program for the day?"

"It's considerable of a program. I'm going to pick up a couple of fellows and golf at Chevy Chase. We'll lunch there, then I'm booked for a matinee with the Lauder girls. I'll be home for dinner, then escort you to the Dip crush."

"Dip crush?" repeated his mother.

"Tonight's reception. It's the classiest of the season, they say. The Congressional one's plain dowl. Mother—" he paused suddenly,—
"I've made up my mind what I want to do.

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I'm going to cut out a college grind and go in for the Dip."

"The Dip?"

"Diplomatic," he explained impatiently. "The President will cough up any sort of appointment if you ask him. Of course, I want to pick and choose. They have a habit of firing young chaps down to yellow-fever spots in South America. That wouldn't touch me a little bit. I'd prefer London or Berlin or Paris, but if that's out of the question, why there's the Hague, and Vienna or St. Petersburg, or even Stockholm, though they say it's dull there. I might consider Lisbon or Madrid, perhaps."

"That is mighty condescending of you, my son." Cynthia laughed lightly.

"I'm dead in earnest." The boy spoke in an offended tone.

"When did this occur to you?"

"I've been chewing on it for a week. Franz Lang is home from Guatemala. He's Senator Lang's son, you know. He and I are real chummy. They've drafted him off to Tangier, he sails next week, for a new berth. He's not stuck on Morocco, a little bit; only it's next door to breaking in on Europe. South America, so he says, is the human limit."

"But, Sonnie, young Lang has education; isn't he a Yale man?"

"Yes, only he tells me what lots of other fel-

lows do; that the best way to start in is to forget half of what you learn in college."

"It strikes me, Deb," began Cynthia with slow deliberation, "that even with your mother in Congress you would not stand anything wonderful in a chance, considering your education broke off in an Oklahoma high school."

The boy glanced at his mother; her mouth was set in a straight line and he felt something stern in her eyes.

"I know that, only I'd cram like the deuce for a month or two. You don't know—"

"Now you are getting down to facts, son; I do not know. I am only beginning to find out what a tremendous lot I don't know, as well as what unlimited nerve I had to come here. Still I am here and I am not a quitter. I have got to begin at the bottom and just work, work. That is what I want you to do. If I found it possible to send you to the Court of St. James tomorrow, which is too ridiculous a proposition to even consider,—why, Deb, you don't know enough to be a footman there,—I would not let you go."

"Why?" flared the boy hotly.

"Because I am beginning—merely beginning—to see the folly of a thousand things from which I want to save you. Good-by," she added as they passed under the shadow of the House façade; "think over what I have said to you, have a good time and be a good boy."

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"Good-by." A sulky tone crept into Debonair's voice.

The Congresswoman hurried to the committee room. It was the third meeting she had attended. She dreaded it. Her colleagues were so alert, so thoroughly equipped for the business on hand, so competent to deal with every question that faced them that more than once she had felt herself thrust ignominiously in the background. She had voted as intelligently as she knew how, but she was wishing constantly that Blair might take her place. Occasionally the men coached her, some of them kindly and courteously, others with a half-concealed smile as if she were an absurd joke, some with a slight trace of disdain or patronage.

She had taken an intense dislike to Simon Grebe, the chairman of her committee. When he aided her in any way it was with a leer, which made the hot blood flush to her cheeks. As she entered, he came forward with his hands outstretched to help her with her coat. She greeted him with a curt nod, utterly disregarding his courtesy. Into his eyes leaped an offended sneer. As she turned aside nervously the cloak of soft gray fur slipped from her arm into a crumpled heap upon the floor. Grebe stepped forward, but it was thrust into her arms and at the same moment she met the smiling eyes of Stephen Cabot, who

had opened the door quietly behind her. She held out her hand with hearty delight.

"Where have you been?" she asked. "I have seen you once since the day you rescued me from—"

"From your clamorous party. Are they cooling off?" he asked genially.

"Yes," laughed Cynthia; "only I thought a good representative was supposed to be on his job from morning till night."

"I am," answered the man gravely, "when it is possible. I was called away two days after Congress met; there was a death in our family."

"I am sorry," began Cynthia with slow, perfunctory sympathy.

"It was nobody I am wearing crape for, merely an ancient granduncle to whom life had become a burden. I had never seen him more than twice in my life. His affairs were in a sadly muddled condition. I had to straighten them out."

The Congresswoman nodded.

"I was impatient enough to get back, I can tell you. A bill comes up in a day or two, which is of considerable interest to my district. I was paired, still I want to be on the ground when it goes through the House. So, they put you on our committee? I am glad." He smiled heartily.

"Yes, only—" Cynthia spoke in a voice

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which had fallen to a whisper—"I begin to realize what a nonentity I am. I fill a chair and sit in front of a name plate, that is all I amount to."

"Wait." Cabot spoke with friendly cheerfulness. "When we arrive we are all as verdant as alfalfa. You will learn something new every day. Besides, this committee is almost human, it was quite a boost for you to achieve a place on agriculture."

"I suppose," explained the Congresswoman, "it was because agriculture figures largely with everything that comes up in our State."

"You are lucky." Cabot watched her intently. "When I arrived they put me on a committee for the disposition of waste paper. That didn't give a fellow much of a chance to distinguish himself."

A smile lingered on Cynthia's lips as she took her chair and glanced across the table at Simon. He sat scrutinizing her over the top of his newspaper. The leering smile had left his eyes; instead, they were full of piqued resentment. When Cabot dropped into the chair beside him, the chairman answered his greeting with an irritated grunt. A chill fear clutched for a moment at Cynthia. She realized how keenly she needed a friend and she knew Grebe might become a vindictive enemy.

She listened to a clerk drone out long, uninteresting minutes which she had heard rehearsed before. The monotonous voice trailed on and on. She looked up with a start and met Cabot's soft, black eyes; at one moment they held a dreamy wistfulness or pathos; suddenly, as they met her gaze, they were filled with a gleam of laughter.

A moment later the clerk's droning voice was interrupted by the clangor of a bell. The men rose to their feet and began to gather up the papers, which lay on the table in front of them. Cynthia glanced about perplexedly.

"Come,"—Cabot leaned across the table,—
"we are going out on the floor to respond to a roll call."

He stood beside the door with her fur coat flung across his arm. Grebe averted his eyes sullenly as he passed them.

"Have you found a home yet?" the Virginian asked, while they followed a straggling group of men through the subway.

"Yes, we are very comfortable."

"Where are you living?"

"I have leased a house on Sixteenth Street."

"Where on Sixteenth? If you give me a ghost of an invitation I mean to call upon you."
He spoke with boyish eagerness.

"I should be delighted. We live on the crest of the hill looking over the city."

"As I remember that quarter," reflected the

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Congressman, "there's nothing up there except palaces."

"I imagine that's what our house is." Cynthia laughed. "In fact, it is spoken of as the Pink Palace."

Stephen Cabot stared at her for a moment incredulously.

"The Pink Palace! Mrs. Pike, you must be absurdly rich. The Austrians wanted to lease that house for an embassy. They couldn't afford it."

"I suppose,"—a smile twitched about her lips,—"I suppose I am what might be called absurdly rich."

"How does it feel to be absurdly rich?" The man regarded her curiously. "I often wonder what the sensation is like. I have known how it feels to be absurdly poor."

"So have I, and not so very many years ago." Cynthia spoke gravely. "Sometimes I think one is happier with wealth, then again, I don't."

"Are you going to the White House to-night?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, are you?"

"I doubt if I can get away. I ought to work until morning, there's so much to catch up with. Generally I can't be hired to attend a White House reception, only if I thought—. This is your first visit here, I fancy?"

"Yes."

"Have you an escort?"

"Debonair, my son, is going with me."

"I wish I might break away," he suggested impulsively.

"Perhaps you can."

"I am afraid—not. I simply glanced at my desk this morning. It looks as if an avalanche had dropped on it. Have you decided," he asked suddenly, "how you are going to vote on the Grebe Bill?"

"Yes. I have studied it thoroughly with Blair. He—"

"Who is Blair?"

"My secretary. He was on a paper in our town. I brought him North with me. He is really—" Cynthia laughed,—"the representative from the tenth district of Oklahoma. I am learning slowly, only at present it is wiser to take Blair's advice."

"What has he advised about the Grebe Bill?" asked Cabot quietly.

"I do not like Grebe, I don't even trust him. I cannot tell you why," added Cynthia slowly; "and although I feel that way about him, I voted for his bill in the committee. Blair thinks it ought to go through."

"Are you sure Blair knows?" demanded Cabot.

"He has studied it for weeks. He is tremendously conscientious; he explained it to me so I think I understand."

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The unfathomable eyes of the young congressman rested on her for a moment. "I wish I had come home a few days ago, I might have changed your views and Blair's. Three votes would kill it when it comes to the House."

"Then you are against it?" questioned Cynthia.

"I am—decidedly. Every man is against it, who sees daylight through Grebe's plan as I do."

"I wish—" began the Congresswoman quickly.

"I distrust Grebe as you do. I have always distrusted him. It is not wholly because I dislike the man that I am against his bill. It is a wonderfully constructed bill, one which throws dust in your eyes to a degree I never knew equaled. You have got to tunnel through the basic part of it to understand that it is a thoroughly bad bill. It may come up in the House any day now. Will you allow me to come tomorrow and talk with you and Blair?"

"Yes," said Cynthia eagerly.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION

IN the entrance to the White House a throng of elegantly clothed human beings were crushed together forty deep. Cynthia Pike paused beside an alcove to lay aside her wraps, then turned and scanned the crowd anxiously. Debonair, who stood at her side a moment before, had suddenly disappeared. She stared over naked shoulders and sleek dress-suits in search of the boy's fair head. He was nowhere to be seen.

The line moved a step at a time, then turned slowly up a stair in the distance. She glanced back; the crowd had closed in behind her as solid as the surge in front. With a reluctant sigh she yielded herself up to become an integral fragment of the polite, smiling crush. Close beside her stood a little old lady struggling nervously with the train of a gray silk gown.

"Let me help you," suggested the Congresswoman kindly. "Or, better still, let me change places with you." She slid the woman past her and took her place at the edge of the line.

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"Thank you." She glanced up gratefully. "It's an awful jam, ain't it?"

Mrs. Pike nodded with a smile. Words were undistinguishable in the chatter which surrounded them. Upstairs hummed a blare of Wagner music, where the red-coated Marine Band was playing.

"I've been telling Abner I've got my doubts whether it's worth while standing here an hour or two just to shake hands with the President." The old lady shrilled her words above the surrounding clamor.

"I am debating the same thing with myself," acknowledged Cynthia. "Only we *are* moving forward and I doubt if we could go back. There is a solid block behind us to the very door."

"All I'm hopin' is my feet stand it. I'm thankful for one thing, I wore an old pair of shoes. I sewed on bows and buckles to hide the elastic fronts. They don't look so terrible bad. If my feet swell up, the shoes won't feel like bursting," she concluded in a loud whisper.

"I wish I had been as wise as you are," Cynthia sighed. "My feet begin to rebel already."

"That's too bad." The little woman spoke sympathetically. "An' we're nowhere near the foot of the stair yet. I suppose there's considerable of a ways to go after we get to the next floor?" She glanced interrogatively at her

husband. "Abner's been here before, I hain't," she explained.

"You've hardly begun the journey yet," the tall man beside her said glumly. "I told you what it would be like, only you *would* come."

They were moving at a snail's pace up the red-carpeted stair, when the old lady flashed an introduction at Cynthia.

"My husband's Judge Dwight of Scitico, Connecticut," she confided. "We know our congressman real well. He got this invitation for us. I've been perfectly crazy to come. Abner wan't, but I coaxed him into it. I've been wonderin' who you are. Your face looks terrible familiar an' yet I reckon I never met you before."

"I don't believe we have met." Cynthia smiled down at her genially. "My home is in Oklahoma."

"I wan't never there," confessed Mrs. Dwight. "This is the farthest away from Connecticut I ever come in my life. You said your name was—?"

"Mrs. Pike, Cynthia Pike."

"Ain't it queer, your name's as familiar to me as your face an' yet for the life o' me I can't place you. Perhaps," she hazarded, "I've seen your picture in the papers. That's the way with so many folks down here."

"Perhaps," she answered slowly. "I am the Congresswoman from Oklahoma."

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"For the land's sake!"

Cynthia watched a gleam of recognition sweep into the wrinkled, homely face, then came a moment of blank astonishment, afterwards a half-frozen horror as if the name was synonymous with something shameful or criminal.

"My soul! you're the woman who's at the head of this hoorah about suffrage!"

A smile curled Cynthia's lips.

"Well, all I've got to say,"—the faded blue eyes looked up at her curiously,—“is, you don't look it.”

"Thank you." Cynthia smiled again.

A long silence followed. She watched Mrs. Dwight slip her hand into her husband's arm as if for protection and set her foot on a higher step, while she hurried him forward. Once he turned a furtive, hurried glance at the Congresswoman. Cynthia felt her cheeks flush hotly, although she had grown accustomed to the survey she met. She edged quickly into the gap they left and laid her white-gloved hand on the velvet rope. As she moved with the crowd a step a moment, she began to realize the agony of her tightly shod feet. Before she reached the landing the pain had grown excruciating. She peered into the East Room, scanning the assemblage in eager search of Debonair. He was not to be seen. She paused for a moment in an angle of the wall, lifted one throbbing foot from her high-heeled slipper

and drew a quick breath of relief. One moment of release from the cramping pain was a boon. While she stood motionless, the train of a satin gown, bedizened with heavy embroidery, brushed across her poised foot, and its wearer elbowed her way through the multitude. Cynthia gasped in terror; the lady had swept her slipper away.

She reached out her hand to touch the woman's arm, but she disappeared into a chattering group in the East Room. Cynthia poised herself on one silken-hosed toe, debating fearfully what to do. If only Debonair, or any human being she knew, or a servant, or a woman with a sympathetic face, would appear, but she shrank away from the tide of gay, laughing strangers.

"My dear Mrs. Pike,"—a husky voice spoke in her ear. "I did not expect such a pleasure as this!"

She turned her head quickly. Grebe's ruddy face was close beside her own. His protruding eyes stared boldly into hers; he had been drinking. She could feel his hot breath upon her cheek. With a shiver of repulsion she drew herself closer to the wall and laid a fan before her lips.

"Come, take my arm," he said jovially. "I'll steer you through in double quick time straight to the President. I know the ropes. It's useless waiting for this bunch to move."

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He laughed gruffly as he pointed one stubby finger at the line in front of them.

"You're alone, aren't you?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," faltered the woman for a minute.

"I am waiting here for my son."

"Oh, the boy," Grebe laughed boisterously.

"He won't find you in this jam. Probably he's playing escort to somebody else before this time. There are hundreds of pretty girls here. I've dropped one myself to beau you around. Everybody's on deck tonight; it's a good chance for you to get acquainted. Come along, let me introduce you." He held out his arm.

"No, thank you." A haughty tone crept into Cynthia's voice. "I prefer to wait here for my son."

Grebe flung her one look of rage and offended dignity, then strode past the line into the East Room, elbowing his way through with ruthless haste.

Cynthia gulped down a nervous sob and turned away with a sudden determination to limp down the stair, then find her way to a dressing room. When she faced the procession on the marble steps, she met the eyes of Stephen Cabot smiling up at her. A minute later he clasped her hand. "By Jove, what a lucky beggar I am!" he began eagerly. "Don't tell me though that you are going home?"

"No—yes," confessed Cynthia. Her embarrassed eyes dropped before his gaze. "I have not seen the President yet—only—"

"Why are you leaving?"

He led her to a narrow alcove at the top of the stair. "What is the matter?" he queried anxiously. "You limp, have you hurt your foot?"

"No." Cynthia leaned her arm on a window sill and turned to the Virginian with a sudden gust of laughter. "It is not quite so bad as that," she confessed. "I am roving around on one shoe."

"What happened?" A shadowy smile played about the man's lips. "You had two when you started, didn't you?"

"Yes." Cynthia broke into a laugh at his look of bewilderment. "They hurt me horribly so I pulled my foot from one for a moment. While I stood here, it was swept away by a lady's train."

"What a perfectly ridiculous tragedy."

"Yes, wasn't it? I can't hobble in like this to shake hands with His Royal Highness."

"Of course you can't," assented Cabot. "Might I carry you downstairs?"

"Do you realize that I weigh a hundred and fifty odd?"

"That's nothing." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Besides my slipper isn't downstairs. It

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must have traveled as far as the Blue Room before this time."

"Shall I hunt for it?" he asked gravely.

"No, for mercy's sake, no. Imagine you, the gallant young bachelor of the house, searching through that mob for a lady's slipper like the Prince in Cinderella. How would you explain?"

"I should not explain." He laughed disdainfully. "It seems a fitting task for a gallant young bachelor."

"Stay with me," she pleaded, "till I get downstairs. I am going home."

"It's a shame," deplored Cabot, "to spoil your evening and mine."

"Yours?"

"Yes, I rushed through my work to get here. I was hoping to find you, and now the fun is just beginning."

"I suppose so," she acquiesced in a regretful whisper. "Only, what can I do? People are beginning to notice us. Won't you take me to my carriage, please?"

As they descended the empty side of the stair they met curious glances from guests, who were slowly crushing their way up. Cabot paused suddenly.

"I'll tell you what, I'll take a taxi, fly up to your house and bring you another pair of slippers in ten minutes. Can't you wait downstairs in a dressing room?"

When Cynthia expostulated, the Congressman turned on her decisively with his winning smile.

"Don't discuss it. People will be in line when I come back."

It seemed as if she had not waited five minutes when Cabot, breathless and flushed, dropped a parcel in her lap. She laughed abruptly as she opened it.

"Teenie did intend me to be comfortable," she remarked. "She's sent me the oldest, slouchiest slippers I possess."

"Never mind." Cabot glanced up with a laugh, as he knelt to button them. "Nobody will see them but me."

"We are at the very tail of the procession," remarked Cynthia as she arose to her feet.

"I know it. Handle the fingers of the poor President gently. After a man has shaken four or five thousand hands, he must feel that he is earning his salary."

The President had stepped from his dais and the cabinet ladies were breaking up the Eden Musee group they had held for the evening, when Cabot with the Congresswoman on his arm entered the Blue Room hastily.

"I have to confess," said the President genially, "that I might scarcely have missed my mother among the faces which swept past me tonight, still I looked for yours more than once, Mrs. Pike."

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"I feel honored." Cynthia's lips dimpled into a radiant smile.

"Why should you? The first Congresswoman is a more important person than a mere President. Only tell me,"—the jovial face grew grave,—"how does the world go with you, I mean the strenuous little world on Capitol Hill?"

A cloud flitted across the woman's face.

"My colleagues are kinder and more considerate than I had hoped to find them," she acknowledged, "still—"

"Like a President," he suggested, "there are moments when you feel like a very small spoke in the wheel?"

"Hardly a spoke, Mr. President, more like a bit of waste paper caught up in the wheel, fluttering in and out as it goes around. I did not fancy that a President knew crestfallen moments."

"He does." The big man laughed and pointed a finger at Cabot. "Ask the gentleman from Virginia. He is one of the miscreants who defeated my tariff bill."

"I remember," acknowledged Cynthia.

"You have not come to me yet with any troubles nor asked any favors, so far as I remember. That puts you in a class by yourself."

The Congresswoman flushed. "You already carry enough anxieties and responsibilities."

"Few of your colleagues think of that," the President sighed. "Still, even if you do not want anything for a constituent or for yourself, drop in some day. I will be very happy to see you."

"Why," said Cynthia, as she laid her hand inside Cabot's proffered arm and emerged into the ravenous crowd which had begun to fill the banqueting room, "do you know, the President is perfectly human?"

"Perfectly human?" chuckled the Congressman; "to be sure he is. That's exactly where you hit it. Up at the House they either pedestal or crucify him. Neither is fair. He is just what you say, human, and a pretty good specimen of human at that. By the way, while we are in this voracious throng, don't you want something to eat?"

"I do, terribly. I'll confess, I am nearly starved. I did not have time to even sit down at the dinner table."

"I imagine this is strictly private." Cabot glanced about him. "A few minutes ago they took out a lady, who fainted. A waiter had dropped a strawberry ice down her back. We may possibly find seats somewhere."

They paused at the foot of the stair, which led to an upper floor of the White House.

"I imagine this is strictly private." Cabot hesitated. "Still it is not roped off and the average American views anything that is not

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roped off as his. There's a cozy little alcove half way up. Let us usurp that. I'll go after food."

Cynthia seated herself on a bench and gazed down at the chattering, shifting company. Cabot came leaping up the stair with a waiter behind him, carrying a well-filled tray.

"Isn't this jolly?" he cried with boyish glee. "It's a vantage point, we look down on all that is going on and yet stay outside it. We may be thankful we exist in so advanced an age. A legend is extant that in a bygone era the only hospitality offered at a White House reception consisted of a glass of water. This is a picnic."

"It is years, twenty years ago, I believe," mused Cynthia, "since I went to a picnic. I remember the last one," she rambled on as Cabot set out dishes on the bench at her side. "We were coming home from a circus after a perfectly glorious day, and grew hungry, so we stopped and ate what was left over from lunch. A boy I met that day piled stuff together as you are doing now in a pasteboard box. We ate alone in a corner of the rail fence with a thicket of goldenrod below us. The other boys and girls called us high-noses—" Cynthia laughed gleefully; "it seems to me like yesterday."

A strange look crept into Cabot's black eyes. Cynthia's napkin fluttered on the floor. He

glanced at it carelessly, but did not stoop to pick it up.

"Where was that picnic?" he asked abruptly.

"At Brush Hill, near Wichita. Why?"

"Because,"—the Congressman laid his hand upon her arm. "Because I was that boy. Don't you remember me?"

"You!" Cynthia turned a dazed glance upon him, then she laughed. "I have often wished I had known your name. Why, you have scarcely changed, you are still a boy, the boy of twenty years ago. Why didn't I know you?"

"I can't imagine why I did not recognize you," confessed the Virginian. "I did not connect you with Kansas, your name then was Dolly, Dolly Kent."

"You remember!" murmured Cynthia. "Dolly was a child name I left behind me in Kansas when I married. Nobody has called me Dolly for years. It is strange you should remember."

"It would be strange if I had forgotten." The quick color mounted to Cabot's face. "A man remembers vividly the—"

"What?" asked Cynthia, breaking the long silence.

"The first time he falls in love."

Cynthia averted her face, the long, dark lashes hid her eyes, and she laughed, a low, embarrassed laugh.

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"I suppose I was an impressionable youngster." Cabot spoke in a half-shamefaced tone. "I remember I wrote verses you never saw. I set them to music and I don't know one note from another. They must have been awful! I laid the memory of you away in a niche of my heart, and yet when I met you I did not know you. That fall I went home to Virginia tremendously happy. I dreamed all sorts of dreams. Next summer I went back to visit those Kansas relatives; they told me you had married and gone away, they did not know where. I felt as if my heart was broken. After all those years to come together in congress. It is a queer end to a dream."

"It is a queer end to a dream," acquiesced Cynthia under her breath.

She glanced into the intensely black eyes of the man who sat on the bench beneath her. He looked away abruptly, letting his gaze travel heedlessly over the crush of people on the floor below. A slim, fair-haired boy turned the corner, and glanced eagerly up the stairs, then turned to a girl beside him and climbed to the alcove where they sat.

"Mother," he cried. "Where on earth have you been? I've searched the White House for you from end to end. I met Grebe—he told me you were here with Mr. Cabot,"—the boy nodded carelessly to the young Representative.

Cynthia dropped her clasped hands in her lap.

"I got lost or you did, I don't know which. Fortunately, Mr. Cabot came along and took care of me. Are you ready to go home?"

"Home! well, I should say not," cried Debonair quickly. "Why, the fun's just starting." A smile lit the handsome young face. "Say, I want you to come down and meet a peach of a girl; Sylvia Morrison. Her father's Senator Morrison of Ohio, you know. Won't you come, Mother?" he pleaded. "She's crazy to know you."

"Bring her up here, son," said Cynthia quickly.

CHAPTER XXV

AN ALL-NIGHT SESSION

“**D**ANCE!” repeated the Congresswoman. “It is so many years ago since I have danced,”—she turned to Cabot with a smile,—“you may wish before we have circled the room that you had not suggested it. Washington women dance divinely.” She pointed to the whirling couples in the East Room.

“I am willing to run the risk,” cried Cabot impulsively.

During her early girlhood Cynthia had danced as laun creatures do, with every pulse tingling in rhythm to the music. Bunyan Pike had set dancing at the head of the seven deadly sins. After one minute of wild rebellion against his tyranny, the young wife yielded passively as she had done about other things. Occasionally during those long depressed years a strain of music had aroused the dancing blood in her veins, but she had stifled the wild impulse for motion relentlessly as one does a quick temptation to sin.

She pushed back the loose tendrils of hair, which swept her forehead. A brilliant flush mounted to her cheeks when she felt Cabot’s

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arm encircle her waist, and a magic change fell upon the world. It was a fairy world, lit by a glimmer from thousands of crystal scones, filled with melody by scarlet-coated musicians, hedged in by palms and blossoms, which had been nurtured in some balmy, tropical zone. For more than a century the mirrors in the East Room had reflected lovely, radiant faces, its walls had hearkened to joyous laughter and its floors had echoed to the patter of light footsteps. Cynthia felt herself a reincarnation of all the gaiety which these old rooms had known.

She was dancing, she did not know what, her feet seemed to obey instinctively the rhythm of the music. While she paused for a second to push back a rebellious lock of hair that swept her face, she glanced up at Cabot. The man's dark eyes held an eager light she had seen twenty years ago when the boy had whispered in the moonlight that she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. His words had sounded like wonderful poetry. She remembered the sudden kiss he had given her that night; she felt it burning again on her lips.

They came to an abrupt halt and her partner led her swiftly to the edge of the crowd.

"What is the matter?" she asked in slow bewilderment. She glanced from Cabot to the face of a little, white-haired man, who laid a hand upon her partner's arm. His face was familiar, it seemed as if she had seen him every

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day somewhere, still his personality escaped her.

"What has happened?" she asked in a low voice.

Cabot gripped her arm as if with a quick instinct of protection. The old man beside them did not heed her interruption; he was talking volubly but in a voice so low that it did not rise above the insistent chatter about them.

"We must go with him." Cabot glanced quickly into her eyes.

"Go with him? Where? Why? Who is he?"

"We are under arrest." The young congressman burst out laughing.

"Under arrest?" A frown of perplexity clouded Cynthia's forehead.

The Virginian laughed again and drew her arm closely within his own.

"That's all nonsense, of course. There's a late session at the House. I had really no business to abscond from it. When I left, things were going so stupidly I fancied it might adjourn at any minute. I wanted to be here—with you. I wouldn't have missed tonight for wild dragons." He looked boyishly merry. "I have not told you yet why we were arrested?"

"No, nor who the little pink-cheeked man is that arrested us."

"Bless my heart, don't you know him? It's

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Thurston, the sergeant-at-arms. You see him every day in the House."

"Of course," cried the Congresswoman. "I could not place him." She watched him dart here and there through the crush. "What does he want?"

"Us," laughed Cabot. "Us and all the rest of the delinquents. See, he has whipped together quite a bunch." He pointed to a group of men in dress-suits, who followed the sergeant through the Blue Room.

"I see," acceded Cynthia. "Only I am still in the dark as to why he came for us."

"You have never been corralled like this before. The Grebe Bill is up. It was a foxy move of Grebe to come off down here. I met him tonight in the banqueting room with the Purple Princess, that extraordinary creature from the Chilean embassy. He knew the bill would come up while half the men in Congress were here."

"Yes, only," persisted Cynthia, "you have not told me where we are going?"

"Don't you understand? Thurston will march us back to the House and keep us there till they get a quorum. We will have to sit until—well, until the bill is passed or—killed. God!" cried the man vehemently, "I hope it meets its death."

"Do you mean," remonstrated the Congress-

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woman, "that I must go back to the House to-night? It is past midnight."

"I guess it is." Cabot pulled a watch from his pocket. "It's a quarter past twelve."

"And they expect me," she protested, "to sit there all night alone—with you men?"

"I am afraid," murmured Cabot sympathetically, "that Thurston will insist upon it. He looks as gentle as a white rabbit but when it comes to business you don't get away from him."

"I can go home and change this gown?"

"It does not seem an outrageous thing to demand. Here, Sergeant—" he leaned over to lay his hand upon the shoulder of the little man in front of them. "What are you going to do about this lady? Mrs. Pike can't sit out night on the floor of the House wearing a l. . . gown?"

As Thurston glanced back she saw his gentle face knot into a perplexed frown.

"I don't know what to say about that, Mr. Cabot. Of course I've got to get everybody up there just as quick as wheels will carry them." He paused to glance back through the crowd. "Mr. Benham is here, I had him in ten a minute ago. He knows more about Parliamentary law than anybody else. We'll refer the question to him."

The sergeant-at-arms accosted a tall, grim-faced man, who hurried past them.

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"Mr. Benham," the little man asked with a deprecating cough, "what am I to do about Mrs. Pike? She wants to go home and change her gown before coming to the House."

Benham paused and bowed to the Congresswoman with cold animosity in his glance.

"There is not a moment to spare. You must go, madame, dressed as you are. This situation proves exactly what I have maintained for years; if a woman steps into a man's place, she must meet any situation that comes up like a man." He spoke as impressively as an archbishop, then turned one cold, swift glance on Cynthia and walked suddenly down the stairs.

"Brute!" muttered Cabot hotly. "He has been fighting woman suffrage for twenty years. You know they got it in his State last fall and he is fiercer against it than ever. He realizes the women will knife him next year if they can." The Virginian paused as if a sudden thought had struck him. Then he smiled whimsically. "I might carry the question to the President, I know he would decide *for* you."

"No, don't." Cynthia laughed unsteadily. "Benham is in the right only he might 'ave been more courteous." Her chin quivered for a moment like that of a child preparing to cry. "Take me to the House. I can sit it out as long as you men do. I am glad that you are with me."

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"So am I," murmured Cabot. He touched her hand caressingly and laid her arm within his own.

They waited at the foot of the stair while a maid searched for their wraps among a multitude of bundles. Cabot took Cynthia's cloak from the girl's hands and wrapped it about the woman's shoulders, fumbling awkwardly while he drew the clasps together at the neck.

"Are you sure you will be warm enough?" he asked. "It has suddenly turned cold, awfully cold. I found that out when I went up to your house."

"I will be quite comfortable," she murmured.

"Wait here till the carriage comes."

He returned a moment later.

"It's a bitter night for Washington," he remarked.

Cynthia did not speak while she took her seat in the coupé and he tucked a robe about her knees. She glanced listlessly from the window as they whirled into the wide, empty expanse of Pennsylvania Avenue. Occasionally the windows of the coupé were shaken vigorously by a sudden, fierce gust of wind and a whirl of sleet came spitting against the glass, then froze into thin ridges as it fell. The streets were almost deserted. Occasionally a car clanged past them. Once she watched a cabman shift his reins into one hand while with the other he

lifted a waterproof apron to shelter his face. Here and there a man plodded homeward, holding an umbrella doggedly in front of him like a shield against wind and sleet. The city had been decorated for a parade and bunting hung in twisted wisps on house-fronts, its evanescent dyes making blue and red splashes on the white walls. Flags on the housetops whipped out as stiffly as if frozen, or the wind had torn them into narrow ribbons. The sleet changed abruptly to snow, which swept past them in wild, white flurries.

"I want to talk with you about the Grebe Bill," said Cabot suddenly. "I had intended threshing it out tomorrow with you and Blair. I never imagined it would come to a vote tonight."

Cynthia turned to look at him. In the glow of a lamp they passed; she saw the man's face set with a stubborn, insistent purpose.

"I will not interrupt," she promised. "Tell me. Make it so simple that I can understand the whole situation."

"I am going to ask you to set aside Blair's judgment," he began, "and trust me implicitly. Understand, I have nothing personal against Grebe. He has treated me time and again in committee affairs with gross unfairness, still it is not for that I am fighting him. Neither can I charge anything against the man. I suspect all manner of crookedness, so do others, only

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suspicion is not evidence. We know this—by 'we,' I mean men, who have spent days and weeks in studying the situation—that somewhere behind this bill lies graft and dishonesty and injustice to old settlers, who wrested that strip of valuable land from the unbroken wilderness and built their homes on it. Grebe wants it conserved. You understand that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Cynthia eagerly. "I know, go on."

"On the face of it Grebe's bill seems devoted to the interest of future generations. There is nothing philanthropic about the man, he is intensely selfish and ambitious to line his own nest. Until he began to pose as a public benefactor nobody suspected him. We men, who know Grebe to the hard, pitiless core of his heart, realize how far removed he is from anything saintlike or generous. We also know his record before he came to Congress. It is not a record to be proud of, even if it is not criminal, as the world counts crime today. It simply shows the man as he is, self-made I grant—which he constantly exults over—but mercenary to a degree."

"Still," questioned Cynthia, "how does it affect this bill? Many of you seem to be on his side."

"Some are for it because the Central Oil Company is dead against it. That, however,

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does not affect any of us who have looked into it. What aroused suspicion was this: In his home legislature a clique of men are working for rights to run a railroad over the mountains within twenty miles of the land he wants conserved. There never was a country which offered less encouragement to a railroad than the Chilman territory; a stage coach which traverses the region twice a week hardly earns enough to feed its horses. Settlers must flock there by the thousand before a railroad is a necessity; instead Grebe would drive the settlers out."

"Has Grebe money invested in this railroad scheme?" asked Cynthia suddenly.

"That is where we come up against a blank wall," confessed Cabot. "So far as we can discover he has not. Not a single friend of his nor an acquaintance is interested in the scheme. Other men before him have put through similar legislation or tried to do it, men of his own caliber I mean, and we mean to defeat his purpose if that is his game. He could have a vast tract conserved, then some years hence on one pretext or another have a bit of the wild land set free and at very small cost run a spur line from the main railroad. Millions could be combed from the timber on that mountain side with transportation at hand."

"I understand," cried Cynthia. "Blair never heard this side of it."

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"Probably not. We cannot bring forward mere suspicion."

"If he had heard of it, Blair is so honest he would not have believed it unless there had been proof. I heard the bill threshed out so often in the committee room as well as in the House that it began to sound like a jumble of words. I grew weary of it. If anybody had made it clear to me and human, as you have done, I would have understood it long ago."

"Grebe did not ask you to pledge yourself or anything of that sort?"

Cynthia looked squarely into the eyes of the man beside her. "No, if he had done that, I should have suspected him at once."

"That's what they call log-rolling," confessed the Virginian; "if he had promised support of a bill you might want to put through."

"No," answered the Congresswoman slowly, "he did not dare. He understands I dislike him. He knew tonight, for instance."

"Don't show it too plainly," advised Cabot. "I should never pick out Grebe for a friend—nor an enemy."

"I want him to stay my enemy," said Cynthia with sudden hauteur.

"You women are mysteries to me," confessed the Virginian with a bewildered laugh; "you don't belong in politics."

"I know we don't."

He scanned her for a moment but could see

nothing but her quiet profile. Her eyes were turned on the whitening streets.

"It is trite, I know," Cabot laughed again, "only it seems to me that a woman belongs at home."

"She does," acknowledged Cynthia quietly.

"If the thing looks right to you," began Cabot after a short silence, "will you consider stepping over on our side when the Grebe Bill comes to a vote?"

"Yes," said the Congresswoman thoughtfully.

It was past one o'clock, when they hastened through the House corridors, which were deserted except for a few hurrying Representatives or an occasional knot of scrubwomen, who rose to their feet and stared curiously after the lady lifting a lace gown from muddy floors. The floor of the House was filling quickly and little groups of onlookers were scattered about the gallery. Cynthia's face crimsoned when they leaned forward eagerly as she entered her seat. Although the vast chamber was warm and stifling, she drew the fur-trimmed coat tight about her throat. She felt that naked shoulders were the most indecent thing in the world among a group of absorbed men and curious-eyed strangers.

While she glanced about nervously she met Grebe's eyes. He occupied a bench across the aisle from her. A sudden anxiety leaped to his

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eyes; he rose and was crossing to speak to her when Cabot dropped into his seat. A contemptuous smile twisted Grebe's loose mouth, he swung back on his heel and returned to busy himself with a bunch of papers, which lay on his desk.

Cynthia sat listening impassively to Grebe's last appeal for his bill. He sat down, mopped the perspiration from his flushed face, swept the House with an anxious glance and let his eyes travel squarely toward Cynthia. She looked at him unflinchingly then shivered. Cabot jumped to his feet and began to speak.

It was the first speech Cynthia had heard the Virginian make. At first she marveled at the simplicity of the man. He lacked a certain rugged oratory which Grebe possessed, yet gradually she saw how his earnestness and quiet was holding men. Once during the adventurous days of his youth he had wandered through the vast unbroken timberlands of Grebe's State. He had lived among pioneers and the children of pioneers, listened to their stories of wild adventure and hardship, shared their rugged life and seen their ardent stand for justice. He told stories of land wrested from men and women who were without power or money to fight for territory their fathers or grandfathers had crossed a continent to build a home upon. Cynthia turned her gaze upon Grebe. He had forgotten every one except the

man, upon whom he was leveling eyes filled with hate and vengeance. Once when she saw ashen gray terror leap into his ruddy face, she knew Cabot's suspicion was not a wild surmise.

The battle of words raged until daybreak, then Grebe's followers grew too jaded to stem the tide. When the vote was finally taken, men with reddened, sleep-weighted eyelids began to file out, eager for a breath of cool air. Cynthia paused to lift her train before she went down the littered aisle. In the cloakroom she passed Grebe, who was pulling a disheveled white vest into shape. His lowering eyes met hers for a moment.

While she stood waiting for the throng ahead of her to pass out, she heard a gruff voice speak cordially to the man at her back.

"I'm sorry you lost out, Grebe; damned sorry. I did my best when it came to standing by you, you know that, don't you?"

"Hell! I'm not blaming you."

"When Mrs. Pike played quitter, I knew you were gone."

"I knew it too. The devil take the woman!"

Grebe turned aside to spit as if it were possible to wreak his contempt and wrath upon a cuspidor!

CHAPTER XXVI

MISS DURWARD-TROUP

“WHERE under the canopy did your folks ever find sich an outlandish first name as—Durward?”

The social secretary turned her eyes upon Jane Hagner with the curious scrutiny an entomologist might give to an unclassified bug.

The old woman glanced up with a friendly smile then began to count the stitches she had cast on a knitting needle. “ ’Tain’t that I’m so curious,” she confessed, “only it sounds to me more like a man’s than a woman’s name.”

“My Christian name is not Durward.” The girl’s tone was as frigid as if each syllable had been chipped off with an ice-pick. “My English grandmother was a Durward—a Warwickshire Durward; I use her name with my own—hyphenated.”

“Hi—what?”

“Hyphenated.”

“That’s beyond me. What might highfun-ated be?”

“The names are connected by a hyphen—a dash,—perhaps that is intelligible to you?”

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"Certain. I see now. What might your front name be; the one you don't answer to?"

"Mary." Miss Troup's voice was withering.

"What's the matter with Mary?"

"It is decidedly ordinary."

"You think so?" mused Jane Hagner.

"Mary's always been a favorite of mine. If I'd been consulted I'd have preferred it to Jane. Jane's common as all git-out, but Mary! There's been some very prominent females called Mary, from away back in Bible times—to well, I suppose you wouldn't think much of Bloody Mary."

"My name, Miss Durward-Troup, suits me perfectly. I regret you fail to approve of it. Excuse me, please, there are scores of things to attend to."

"I certainly will," acquiesced the old woman cheerfully. "I brought my knitting along. This library window's the cheerfulest view in the hull house. Go right on with your job. I won't break in on you once. Only if there is a blessed thing I can do, set me at it. There's sich a snarl of servants here to wait on Cynthia that—"

"Cynthia?" repeated the social secretary.

"I presume you refer to Mrs. Pike."

"I certainly do. Nice name, ain't it? I shouldn't hanker for Pike myself, only some-way Cynthia takes the jab out of it, softens it, as 'twere. Down home we swear by Cynthia

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Pike. 'Tain't because she's our congresswoman or that she's rich as pink mud or that she stands for our cause or—"

"Does she stand loyally for our cause?" Miss Durward-Troup turned suddenly to fix her gaze on the speaker.

"Stand for our cause!" snapped Jane Hagner. "Young woman, you take my word for this: Cynthia Pike stands for more to our cause than a hull torchlight procession of ordinary suffragettes. The brand o' female with a voice like a crosscut saw an' a face tied up in a hard knot, who goes pawin' the air every chance she gets, won't do much revolutionizin' or I miss my guess."

"Really." Miss Durward-Troup laid down her pen and looked mildly interested. "I wish I might see the type you portray so vividly. I do not believe we have them here."

"Shucks! we have them here an' everywhere an' we all know it! They're blabber an' bluff an' bluster. What's more they're generally the women that ought to be home brushin' out behind the stove or settin' a patch on little pants or wipin' the baby's nose." A flash of amusement made creases about the shrewd old eyes as she caught the look of disgust which chased across the secretary's face.

"I can think of no one in my circle of acquaintance who answers your description." Miss Troup's tone was glacial.

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"This is the last time I'm goin' to interrupt you." Jane Hagner did not look up as she knitted fiercely. "You an' me's goin' to see considerable of each other for the next four months, consequently, Miss Private Secretary, it's a pretty good way to start off knowin' each other's views. Cynthia told me considerable about the work you've done for the cause, about your leadin' a pageant on horseback dressed up like Joan o' Arc. She said you addressed meetin's an' marched a delegation into the White House, that you'd gone before Congress itself. That's all right for you. Bein' a spinster, you can—"

The private secretary sat beating an impatient tattoo upon the blotter with one slender finger.

"I said spinster," continued Jane Hagner after a brief pause. "I'd an idea you'd like it better than old maid. I reckon you ain't old enough yet to be put into the old-maid class. Anyway I'm goin' to thresh things out if you can listen. It may save a sight o' misunderstandin' later on. I'm for woman suffrage. I was hammerin' away for it long before you was born. The trouble today is there's too many fool females at the head an' front o' things."

"I wish," cried the girl impatiently, "that you would choose some other term than females."

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"For the land's sake, why? What have you got against females?"

"Nothing," explained Miss Durward-Troup, "except that the word itself belongs to an almost extinct period, the period of female seminaries and—"

"Well, I swum! What was the matter with female seminaries?"

"They are reminiscent of the eternal trammel of womanhood. The power women wield today is sexless."

"Sexless," repeated the old woman aghast. "That beats me! I reckon you would do away with what the Bible says, male and female created He them."

"Not exactly." The girl's tone was suave. "But along the lines of education, religion and politics, power ought to be sexless. It is sexless."

"That," gasped Jane Hagner, "sounds to me on the very edge of indecency."

"Nonsense." Miss Troup's eyes flashed angrily. "You were disapproving of married women in our ranks; I think you accused them of forgetting to sweep behind the stove. It suggests the ridiculous myth that a woman who comes over to our side neglects her home. I am not—understand me—veering around to personalities, only I understand that you left a husband at home alone for the winter."

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"Not alone," acquiesced Mrs. Hagner cheerfully; "I have an unmarried daughter who's as good a housekeeper as I am. Her father's going to be as well cared for as any man I know."

"Pardon me."

"I was talking about why a married woman, a level-headed, middle-aged woman, who has piloted a man through the shoals an' quicksands of life—"

"You mean the sort of a woman who drags her husband at her chariot wheels?"

"I mean nothin' of the kind." Jane Hagner's knitting needles clicked aggressively. "I'm talkin' now about the woman who stands for peace an' comfort in a home an' gets it by guidin' her husband. There are men who, as Teenie says, 'you can neither lead nor ca', but generally they're the kind you can guide an' there are more homes in America made happy because a woman knows how to guide a man than you have any idea of. If you've got ordinary gumption you can make a man go about as you want him to without his knowin' it an' all the time let him think he's got leadin' strings on you. It's queer," she chuckled, "mortal queer. You don't understand—you can't be expected to yet—you got to live with a man to know the sex—"

"Indeed?"

"What I'm trying to get at is this, women

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don't set out to manage a politician the way a woman does her husband."

"Have you any methods to offer different from those we follow now that you imagine might succeed?" asked the secretary haughtily.

Jane Hagner dropped her knitting in her lap and gazed across the top of her glasses at the girl.

"I went to the House with Cynthia yesterday an' set in her office for hours. Folks come an' went; it was interestin', mighty interestin'. My soul! how it did show up human nature! There was one fellow I'd like to take an ax to an' two or three I'd enjoy knowin' better. A dozen folks come in whimperin' for jobs. I saw enough o' the mean side of humanity to bring tears to the eyes of a cast-iron hitchin' post. What I started to tell you about was a woman, a regular old batterin' ram, who spoke up for a pack of suffragists. I didn't put in my oar till she commenced layin' down the law to Cynthia, who advised them to have patience. 'Patience,' trumpeted the female, 'our followers are through with patience; we are forced to take our cue from the unfortunate widow in the Bible, who got what she wanted by keepin' everlastingly after it.' "

"That was Mrs. Dunlap, I imagine," said the private secretary. "It is her pet argument. Her husband, you know, was the late General Dunlap."

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"No wonder the General's a late. She must have ragged the very daylights out of him. She got Cynthia as nervous as a witch, she had work piled up, a perfect mountain of it waitin' to be tackled, so I sailed in. It didn't do one mite of good, all that old windjammer did was to go buttin' against the ceilin' like a distracted June bug. She's an out an' out disgrace to the party. She don't know no more about suffrage than that there hassock!" Jane Hagner kicked over a footstool beside her.

"Mrs. Dunlap is a person we can't afford to offend," explained Miss Durward-Troup. "She has money, lineage and position. She entertains royally and probably contributes more to the cause than any woman in America."

"I don't give a whoop if she does. We'll never land anywhere with a Choctaw like her for our Moses."

A long silence ensued. The knitting needles clicked steadily and Miss Durward-Troup's pen moved with nervous haste across the paper. Invitations were going out for the Congresswoman's first dinner party. As the secretary stamped each envelope she glanced at the rugged profile of the old woman silhouetted against the sunshine. A smile of subtle intention fled across the girl's red lips.

"Mrs. Hagner," she began softly, "I have been curious to know the exact story of Mrs. Pike's election. We heard a dramatic account

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of it here. Her opponent took flight or something like that, didn't he?"

"Yes, flight's the word," answered Jane grimly. Two long furrows creased her forehead and her lips settled into a stern line. "If he hadn't legged it out o' the State, and that as quick's he knew how, there would have been a lynchin'."

"What was his name?"

"Beverly, Burke Beverly. He was the blackest villain that ever set foot in Oklahoma and that's goin' some. He was a grafter, a wife deserter, a thief, a mouthin' mountebank and an abandoned outlaw."

"Was he really so bad as that?" asked the girl with a shiver.

"Bad!" repeated Jane Hagner slowly. "He wan't worth the powder and shot you'd need to blow him to pieces."

"Tell me the story," pleaded the secretary eagerly.

While Jane Hagner talked, the young woman watched her steadily. Her eyes narrowed slowly till she looked out between half-closed lids with a steady, intent, scrutinizing gaze.

When the old woman stopped abruptly with the story of a house left in darkness, the secretary drew a long breath and straightened herself in the chair.

"What became of Beverly and his wife?" she asked

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"Heaven knows."

"They may have committed suicide." The girl watched every expression that fled across the old woman's face.

"No sich luck. Their kind hain't the moral courage to put themselves out o' the way. My idea is they're layin' low in some out o' the way place, waitin' a chance to get even with Cynthia Pike. He's devil clean through. Olympia's bad, only she's different; she's viperish. She'll abide her chance to strike. When the right time comes—"

The secretary rose hurriedly and began to gather up the letters, which lay scattered about her desk.

"Don't tell me anything more. It's a horrible story, worse than I had dreamed of; it haunts me."

"It haunts me," confessed the old woman, "worst of all when it faces me in the dead of night. Once when I was a little girl, way up in Vermont, a big snake escaped from a circus. They beat the woods an' the mountain round our place for weeks. At last they give up huntin' for it. I reckon when winter come it froze to death, but I was growed up before I could go out in the pasture without the terror of that thing rearin' up its head in front o' me. I feel the same way about Burke Beverly an' Olympia."

"Don't," cried the secretary with a stifled

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scream, "you make me shiver all over."

"There's nothing for you to worry about." The old woman's voice grew kindly. "If they ever come snakin' out from the underbrush nobody'll be in danger but Cynthia Pike an' maybe me. They'd like to pot me, I reckon. I come up here to look out that nothin' happens to Cynthia. She'd never suspicion folks."

"Then," cried Miss Durward-Troup with an unsteady laugh, "people are mistaken; they are saying you came here to break into society."

"Me—break into society!" Jane Hagner's face wrinkled into a delighted laugh and she rose slowly to her feet. "Take one good square look at me. Do I strike you as the kind o' female who'd hanker to break into society?"

"No," acknowledged the girl with a sudden smile. "No, I—"

She paused and turned her head when the library door swung open. Debonair entered. Following him came a slender, graceful man, who looked like a Beau Brummell touched slightly by the frosts of time. He was lithe and courtly and still preserved a flush of youthful grace and suave winsomeness. He moved swiftly across the room, lifted the face of the young secretary and kissed her. She turned to the old woman, who sat knitting beside the window.

"Mrs. Hagner," she began, "allow me to in-

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introduce to you my father, Major Guy Eric Ponsonby Troup."

"Madame,"—the man bent over her hand with a courtly obeisance,—“madame, it gives me the utmost happiness to meet you.”

"Thank you, sir," answered the old lady bluntly.

"One glance into your gentle face tells me that my sweet young daughter will find in you a motherly guardian. Besides"—he paused for a moment as if choking down a sob. "Has no one ever observed before your marvelous, your speaking likeness—to—" he seemed too moved to speak.

"It strikes me I remind 'most everybody I meet o' some departed relative."

"It was—our sainted,—our dearly beloved—Queen Victoria."

"Mrs. Hagner," cried Debonair as the door closed behind the secretary and her father, "don't you call that a classy compliment?"

"Major Guy Eric Ponsonby Troup may have felt that way about it, only it don't go to my head. I've seen pictures of the queen. She was a portly, distinguished-lookin' old party, only she wan't what you'd have called classy."

"You can't deny," said the boy as he threw himself into a luxurious arm chair, "that Miss Durward-Troup's classy. When Mother introduced me to her this morning you could have knocked me over with a tenpin. She's abso-

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lutely the swellest thing I've seen in Washington. She has what they call English coloring and the way she carries herself is perfectly swagger. It's in her blood; you can see that with half an eye. Her father's an old aristocrat. You noticed how he choked up; perhaps the old queen was a blood relative of his."

"Perhaps,"—Jane Hagner rolled up her knitting and stuck the pins through it,—"only to begin with I hain't no use for a man with three initials in front of his name, it's more letters than any one's entitled to in this expensive age—"

"That's no fault of his, Aunt Jane," cried the boy rebelliously.

"Just the same I wouldn't leave that shift-eyed old fox alone where my silver spoons were layin' round loose."

"Aunt Jane!" cried Debonair in a shocked voice. "(—)" he muttered while he stared after her glumly. "I can see us trying to hobble into select circles with her at our heels. There's some funny times ahead for this family."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SOCIAL COBWEB

ONE morning while the pink palace on Sixteenth Street slumbered in a flood of January sunshine, Cynthia sat up in bed, spooning out a grape fruit. Teenie moved silently about the room, putting things in order.

"Is it late?" asked the Congresswoman.

"Late enouch for able-bodied fowk tae be up an' about."

"You mean—" Cynthia laughed merrily.

"I mean it's twenty-five minutes past eleven." The Scotchwoman regarded her mistress with calm, unconcerned eyes.

"Teenie, did you ever hear of *lèse majesté*?"

"It don't seem tae me I remember anybody o' that name."

"No?" asked Cynthia in a spasm of mirth.

"No, but I'm thinkin' your job begins at twelve o'clock."

"I'm sick of rushing there on the stroke of the hour like a child at school. Half the men don't show up at noon. Scores of them are not in town even half the time."

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"An' yet they draw their pay!" The rugged face looked critical.

"Of course."

"It seems tae me," observed the servant with merciless severity, "if I took pay—pay as big as theirs is, that I'd stick on my job."

"Of course you would," said Cynthia nonchalantly. "Your tissue is all conscience."

"I'm an honest servant, ma'am!" snorted Teenie; "neither mair nor less."

Cynthia's voice changed, there was a note of tenderness in it. "I know you are, nobody realizes that so truly as I do. Only, Teenie, don't nag at me, as you used to do in the old days. I suppose I ought to be up and at work only one can't be out all night then rise as you do with the chickens."

"'Twould be better for your luiks if you did. You're beginning to show your age."

"What?" Cynthia glanced with a gleam of terror in her eyes into a mirror which stood on the little table beside her. "Teenie, you are cruel, absolutely cruel. Felice never says things like that. She—"

"I'll warrant she don't." The old servant laughed disdainfully. "I ken Felice. It's, '*Oui, Oui, Madame*, you are zee most raveeshin' beauty, ah, *Oui, Oui*.'" Teenie flung up her gaunt hands in grotesque imitation of the French maid, whom she loathed.

"Don't, Teenie," cried her mistress between

peals of laughter. "Don't. The lady on the Capitol dome would shriek at the burr in your French."

"It's her tae the life jist the same," insisted the woman stolidly. "Why dinna ye hae Felice about you mair than you do? There's times when she's sae jealous o' me she canna hide her hatred."

"I don't know," confessed Cynthia; "perhaps I am accustomed to you, we know the worst and the best of each other. Felice keeps my clothes in beautiful order and she knows so perfectly what I ought to wear that it saves me no end of bother; only—Teenie," she paused as if ashamed of her confession, "when she babbles away and I can't understand ten words she says, I get so ridiculously nervous sometimes that I could scream. I hate those little rat eyes of hers and her cold fingers creeping over me and—"

An odd smile crinkled Teenie's mouth as she turned away to answer a knock at the bedroom door.

"It's Miss Durward-Troup," she announced. "Do you want to see her?"

"Of course," cried her mistress.

"Good morning," she said cheerfully as the private secretary swept in with a bundle of letters and a note-book in her hand.

"Good morning," answered the girl suavely. "Shall I disturb you, Mrs. Pike, if I talk while

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you eat breakfast? There is considerable to attend to this morning."

"Certainly not, sit down." Cynthia's tone was genial. "I am glad to have you here. I suppose I ought to be up, only when you chip off time as I've been doing at one end of the day you have to make it up somewhere."

"Of course," answered Miss Troup sympathetically. "Now may I run through your engagement list? This is a full day."

"Every day seems full to me." The Congresswoman sighed while she stirred her coffee. "I can't imagine where time goes."

"You lunch at one with Mrs. Hargreave Bowles."

"I loathe luncheons," objected Cynthia. "Besides it is nearly twelve now. I can't possibly eat again at one."

"The invitation was accepted ten days ago." Miss Troup did not raise her eyes. "I should suggest that you wear your rose crepe. You look pale this morning."

"Teenie told me the same thing a few minutes ago," conceded the woman ruefully.

"It is nothing but the merest shade of tire," cried the secretary quickly. "There! as you smile it disappears."

"Just the same I am tired, horribly tired. I wish I could cut everything out for one day and do exactly what I want to do instead of

what everybody else insists upon." Her tone was petulant.

"You may when Lent comes," suggested the girl soothingly. "Only during the next few weeks, society will make a hundred demands upon you. You can achieve a place in Washington society before that time. Of course you have a place now, a most important place—politically," she added quickly, "only it has not been easy to secure exactly the invitations we wished. Old-fashioned, conservative families, who are really of importance here, look on woman suffrage with absurd horror. Mrs. John Tremont asked me once if we had any ladies among our followers."

Cynthia laughed. "Do you wonder?" she asked.

"I wonder at Mrs. Tremont," answered the girl stiffly. "Her remark, made to me, was absolutely rude. But to return to our engagements. This is your afternoon at home."

"Good gracious, I had forgotten. I must go to the House," cried Cynthia. "When can I break away from that confounded luncheon?"

"Probably about three o'clock."

"Three! Blair was furious yesterday because I had only half an hour to spare. There's a mountain of work piled up at the office, things I must see to myself. I promised to spend the whole afternoon there."

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"You cannot do it. This is your first at-home day since you made the round of calls. Besides—I announced in the *Post* this morning that you would receive."

"After that," asked Cynthia desperately, "what comes?"

"Three teas, you can do them all between six and seven. I have planned a route for Alphonse, he can take you around quickly. Ten minutes at each place will be sufficient, only they are houses where you ought to be seen."

"Then?"

"A dinner at Senator Brand's at eight. Afterwards you go with them to a ball at the French Embassy."

"And to bed, when?"

"Perhaps you can slip away about one o'clock."

Cynthia sighed. "I do not feel now as if I could keep my eyes open till one o'clock. I used to imagine I would love this sort of thing. I did for a few weeks. I am growing tired of it, horribly tired. I am tired of the idiotic smile on women's faces, tired of their chatter; fortunately you don't have to remember it or even answer it."

"Of course not," agreed the secretary. She smiled indulgently as one might at a fretful child. "Only presently you will love it as if you had spent all your life here."

"Never," cried Cynthia decisively.

"One thing more," suggested Miss Durward-Troup. "Is Mrs. Hagner to be included among the dinner guests?"

"What dinner guests?" asked the Congresswoman bewilderedly.

"I mean at the dinner you give on the seventh?"

"Did you imagine for one moment," Cynthia spoke with a slow emphasis, "that I did not intend to have her at the table?"

"I asked," explained the secretary very suavely, "because you did not include her when we made up the list and the invitations are out."

"You are to be a guest, are you not?"

"I have that honor," the girl smiled; "in a way, of course, I am necessary."

"Remember, if I do not mention Mrs. Hagner's name in making up a list of guests, it is because I take it for granted that she is to be present, like my son. She is one of my oldest and truest friends."

"I understand." Miss Troup changed color slightly. She had transgressed and she knew it. "The acceptances have come in; another man will have to be invited, since Mrs. Hagner is included."

"Would you like to ask your father?" asked Cynthia kindly. She had felt a throb of con-

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trition as she watched a hurt flush chase across the girl's face.

"If you desire. I do not know whether he has an engagement or not." Miss Troup met the Congresswoman's eye with a haughty look. "Whom shall I have him take in to dinner if he can come?"

"Any one you wish, any one except Mrs. Hagner," she added hastily. "You know the people, who are coming and how to pair them. I don't. I leave that sort of thing to you. Please ring now for Felice. I must dress in a hurry."

The secretary was gathering up her letters to leave the room when Cynthia spoke.

"Miss Troup. I want you to understand this: I must have one day; one complete day a week left perfectly free from social engagements. I cannot do my work at the House in less."

"I understand."

The secretary went out, shutting the door softly behind her. Cynthia moved across the room and leaned her face close to a mirror, which stood in a brilliant light between two windows. She studied her reflection for a moment then sighed.

"I get the truth from Teenie," she murmured, "the plain, unembroidered truth. I look thirty-eight, every day of it!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DINNER PARTY AT THE PINK PALACE

MISS DURWARD-TROUP glanced at a tiny ivory clock, which ticked on her dressing table. It was twenty minutes past seven. She lifted her gloves, picked up a fan and ran downstairs to take a last glance at the dining table. In the hall she met Debonair, who stared at her in breathless admiration. The girl had looked beautiful in the plain gown she wore while at work in his mother's library. Once, too, he had watched her bend over the tea table in a chiffony frock like a drift of sea-foam and for a day or two afterwards he went about with a picture of her loveliness before his eyes, but in her dinner gown of pale gold crepe with its bodice of yellow lace she dazzled and shone. Her necklace of topaz held gleams as lambent as the sheen of her soft hair.

"She looks—" thought the boy. Then he paused, filled with a vague perplexity.

"By Jove, Miss Troup, I remember!" he cried.

"Had you forgotten something?" asked the girl with her quick fascinating smile.

"I know now who you look like. It's the yel-

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low lady in the Corcoran gallery, the lady, watching the gold fish, who has such marvelous eyes. I stood before that picture once trying to think what her eyes reminded me of. It was jade. You have seen bluish, sea-green jade, haven't you?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes,"—her lips parted in a seductive smile,—“but is it a compliment to tell a lady she has green eyes?"

"By Jove," insisted the boy impetuously, "green eyes are wonderful when you think of brown or black or gray or blue or drab—actually I once met a girl who had drab eyes. Great Scott, green eyes are luminous."

"Thank you," said the secretary softly.

"Oh, I say, Miss Troup," burst out the boy hotly, "you are really the yellow lady come to life."

"Yes, I know. Please don't talk so loud. Can you keep a secret? Nobody guessed it before and the canvas has hung there for a year."

"Why should you care?" asked Debonair perplexedly.

"It seems horrible." She shivered. "Standing there, a target for human eyes. I felt a terror of Pascal's gaze while he painted me."

"Then why," exclaimed the boy, "did you pose for him?"

"I had to." Her voice held an appeal for pity.

"You had to?"

"Father was ill"—Miss Troup turned a wistful glance upon the lad, who watched her with a flushed face. "They had to operate on him—the operation cost a hundred dollars. Of course he could not go to a charity ward,"—she lifted her head with a haughty gesture,—"so—"

"So you did that for him—hating to do it!" A thrill of admiration rang in Debonair's voice.

"Pascal came here to paint a picture of the President,"—she told her story with a rush. "One day I was walking down Connecticut Avenue and he followed me. When I reached Farragut Square he spoke to me. I thought of calling a policeman, then I saw he was a gentleman. He asked if I would pose for him. I refused. There was no terrible necessity for it that day. Later—"

"I think," cried the lad, "it was the bravest thing I ever heard of in my life. It is such a blasted shame—"

"What?" she asked softly.

"That you should have to work for Mother or anybody else. I watched you the other day pouring tea and doing the polite to these vulgar old frumps who know you are a secretary and who treat you as if they knew it. Oh, I could have—"

"Where were you?" The girl turned a slumberous glance on him. "I did not see you."

"No." Debonair flushed scarlet. "I watched the tea-drinking contest—that's what

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Jane Hagner calls it—from behind a tapestry in the gallery. It was funny."

"Was it?"

"Yes, blamed funny and—maddening. I wanted to throttle that idiotic old Wilde woman. Her husband made his wad out of soap grease. Soap grease!" he repeated disgustedly. "She looks it."

"Mrs. Wilde is not so rude as others."

"Isn't she? I heard her lay down the law to you about something—"

"I remember." Miss Troup spoke quietly. "Your mother did not go to her tea last week. She blamed me for it."

"Old cat! And you—with your breeding and blood and beauty—"

"Come downstairs with me, won't you?" interrupted the girl hastily. "I want to see if the table is complete. Bradshaw is not infallible."

"Why," cried Debonair as he pushed aside the portières and glanced at the brilliantly lit dining room, "this is simply out of sight! Did you plan it alone?"

"Yes."

Miss Troup leaned forward to sniff at a splendid rose.

"It's a picotee. Nothing I ever saw touched it."

"I am glad." The secretary's face dimpled

with smiles. "You have artistic feeling. I have seen it in you time and again."

"Have you, really?" A delighted flush swept the boy's cheeks.

"The day you transformed the little bijoutry room,"—the secretary pointed over her shoulder to an apartment where green portieres hung,—"I saw your genius. I had been longing to change things there myself. One morning I found it made over—it is almost beautiful now. It was a horror chamber before. Bradshaw said you did it."

"Yes,"—there was a scornful tone in Debonair's voice. "Wasn't it a fierce place? That mess of junk got on my nerves, china rabbits, wooden milkmaids, painted snuff-boxes, carved temples and blue windmills. I'll tell you why the room looks decent. Most of the junk's in the bottom drawer of that hoodah cabinet."

"Oh," laughed the secretary. "That is where it belongs."

"I could not have touched you on this table decoration. It's perfectly spiff. The way you have tossed these yellow roses about,—what an extraordinary yellow,—they light up this big, tawny room with its smoky rafters; why, it's great."

"I am happy because you like it." The girl smiled radiantly.

"Like it! It's a stroke of genius. Oh, say,"

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he asked suddenly, "what's the matter, Miss Troup?"

The secretary seemed to have forgotten the lad's presence. She picked up a dinner card from a plate and turned to Bradshaw haughtily, as he entered the room with a tray full of silver.

"What right had you to change these cards?" she asked in an imperious tone.

"Mrs. Pike made the change, Miss Troup." Not a ray of expression flitted across the man's mask-like face.

"When?"

"She came in an hour ago to look over the table. She said a mistake had been made in seating some guests."

Debonair watched the girl's face while the butler made his explanation. She bit her lips, laid the cards back upon the plates and leaned forward to straighten a heavy rose, which had fallen from the silver bowl in the center of the table.

"Miss Troup, what's the matter?" asked the boy sympathetically.

"Nothing. I made a mistake in seating the guests."

"Who?"

"No one of consequence." She smiled wistfully.

"Who?" persisted the boy.

"Only myself," she confessed reluctantly.

"What change did Mother make?"

"I had planned to have Judge Hayden take me in to dinner."

"Why in the thunder should you pick him out? He's as lively as a tombstone."

"I thought I would be taking him off other people's hands, so I—"

She walked quickly to the other side of the table and glanced at the card on another plate.

"Who have you got now?" demanded Debonair.

"Congressman Flaherty," she smiled tremulously.

"Flaherty—that bat-eyed old moss back! Oh, I say, Hayden's a peach compared to Flaherty. I'm going straight to Mother."

"Don't," cried the girl; "for my sake—don't."

"Why?"

"You must not do it. Mrs. Pike knows how she wishes to seat her guests. This morning she left it to me. I did the best I could."

"Of course you did," agreed the boy abruptly.

"She made no suggestions about any one except you and herself. She goes in with Secretary Sedgwick."

"And I?"

Miss Troup's face dimpled into a smile.

"You take Miss Sedgwick in."

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"Not if I know it. Heavens, I had a dose of her at the Roget dinner."

"Was she uninteresting?"

"She knows just one thing—suffrage. Miss Troup, I am growing tired, dog-goned tired of suffrage." He stared at her morosely. "I won't sit out an evening with Miss Sedgwick. I'm going to take you in."

"You can't." A gleam of terror flashed across the girl's face.

"I am. What's more, I'm going straight to Mother, to tell her so."

"Mr. Debonair—for my sake, don't. You will make endless trouble."

"What sort of trouble?" asked the boy impatiently.

"Mrs. Pike will not allow you to upset her plans. I don't mind Mr. Flaherty, really—all he does is to eat and drink, he does not try to make conversation."

"Pig!" cried Debonair with quick contempt.

"Talk to Miss Sedgwick about genealogy. She has just discovered that their branch of the family was descended from Henry the Eighth."

"She looks it," growled the boy. "But, say, who has Mother given to the Judge? He is the second biggest gun here, isn't he?"

"Yes. He takes Mrs. Hagner in."

The boy stared for a moment incredulously.

"Say, pinch me, won't you? Is Jane Hagner in on this? Why, she doesn't own a dud that's

fit to wear on the street. As for a dinner with a cabinet officer and a Judge of the Supreme Court—Good Lord! I don't believe Aunt Jane ever went to a dinner party in her life."

"Hush," whispered the secretary; "somebody is coming downstairs. Mr. Debonair, if you are a friend of mine, please, please, do not say a word about anything."

The lad nodded, shrugged his shoulders, then walked toward the hall while the secretary flitted round the table with a critical glance. She did not look up until some one entered the room.

"Aunt Jane!" cried Debonair with an unsteady laugh. "Upon my soul, I didn't know you."

"That's what I thought as I sailed past the long mirror in the hall. I reckon I'll go down street tomorrow an' have a picture made in this outfit. 'Twan't look no more like me than all git-out, only it will show fash what you can do if you have the money an' a crack sewin' woman and somebody to hook you up. I won't make many speeches tonight as long as this, my breath's goin' back on me. I'm laced up an' buttoned in so I—"

"Who did it?" Debonair walked around her critically. A boyish smile hovered over his face and laughter twinkled in his eyes.

"Your mother's dressmaker, Madame Bruyere—real good lookin', ain't it, Sonnie?"

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"You bet it is," he agreed as she switched aside the shimmering, black train. "It's a wonder."

"It ought to be. Think of two hundred dollars for one dress! Land's sake, I could buy enough clothes with that to last me three years. Two hundred dollars didn't cover it, either; there was beaded slippers,"—she thrust out one foot from under the voluminous draperies,—“an' gloves,—think of six dollars for one pair of gloves! And this shaving-brush arrangement stickin' up on my head cost all outdoors."

"Who togged you out?"

"Teenie an' a hair-dressin' lady. My soul, what she made me suffer! I set for an hour bein' singed and crinkled and fluffed and frizzled. There's seventeen dollars' worth of another woman's hair on top of my head into the bargain," she sighed. "You never dreamed your Aunt Jane would come to this! Did you, Sonnie?"

When the boy took the old lady's arm within his own and led her to the rose-heaped table, Miss Troup regarded her with calm scrutiny.

"Aunt Jane looks like a dowager Duchess, doesn't she?" asked Debonair proudly.

"Really," began the girl doubtfully, "I do not—"

"Miss Troup's owned half a dozen dowager duchesses among her forebears. She knows I look as like a Duchess as I do the Mufti of Crete.

But, Deb, where's your mother? The French-woman's having conniption fits because she don't get home."

"Isn't Mother upstairs?"

"She ain't in the house so far as anybody can make out. Do you know where she went, Miss Private Secretary?"

"Bradshaw says she drove away about ten minutes to seven." Miss Troup did not lift her eyes.

"Did Mrs. Pike tell you where she was going?" demanded Jane Hagner as the butler entered the room.

"No, madame."

"I wonder if they are having a late session at the House?" Debonair tossed aside a window curtain and looked across the city.

"No, the beacon isn't burning. It's twenty minutes to eight. People may blow in at any minute."

"If they do, Deb, it is up to you and me to take her place till she arrives."

"Yes, with Miss Durward-Troup," the boy flashed a chivalrous glance at the secretary.

"Of course," acquiesced the old woman, "she'll have to introduce us to some folks."

"We might as well line up now in the little bijoutry room," suggested Debonair. "Isn't that the proper place to receive, Miss Troup?"

"Yes," murmured the girl, while she led the way with quiet grace across the hall.

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"Great Scott!" Debonair swung around nervously on his heel as he listened to the loud purr of a motor, which stopped at the door. "That isn't Alphonse's honk."

At the stroke of eight Secretary Sedgwick, with his ruddy, towering daughter, entered the reception room. They were followed by Stephen Cabot and a famous old admiral whose keen eyes inside a network of wrinkles seemed perpetually scanning the horizon for an enemy. After them came Judge Hayden and his wife, a simply gowned woman with a kind, shrewd face and a genial smile. Each guest swept the group with a glance of perplexity, as if in search of the hostess.

Jane Hagner relieved the tension with a laugh.

"The antis ought to get onto this situation," she observed pleasantly. "They're busy digging up arguments about why females shouldn't go into politics. They never thought of a Congresswoman being kept so busy, she can't get home in time for her own dinner party."

"We adjourned early tonight," explained Cabot; "only the House office building is thronged with suffragists, who are planning some monstrous parade."

"Probably some of them are holding her up," began Kramer of Texas. "The other night I got into my coat and hat. I had promised my wife to come home early when—"

Jane Hagner listened to the man's droning voice go on and on. She smiled occasionally as if in acquiescence to a story she did not hear. Once she glanced sympathetically at Debonair as she saw anxiety grow in his eyes. Major Ponsonby Troup arrived late but instantly constituted himself a *pro tem* host, moving about the room with quiet self-possession, paying a compliment here, telling a story there, bridging an awkward silence with the aplomb of a clever host. Jane Hagner glanced at his daughter. The girl introduced the last guest and stood listening while a motor paused at the side door with a stifled yelp. Her eyes seemed to change from blue green to an intense black as they followed her father's graceful progress about the room. Once there was a flash of pride in her glance, then an odd, critical, half-concealed scorn. While she lifted her face suddenly to answer a question Miss Sedgwick asked, she met her father's eyes squarely with a glance of cold hatred. He answered it with a calm smile.

When Bradshaw flung aside the portieres Cynthia Pike hurried into the room with both hands outstretched in eager apology. Debonair pushed forward, to throw his arm about her and lead her around the circle of guests. In a gown of snowy crepe weighed down with fringe and embroidery, the boy thought he had never seen his mother look so lovely.

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"I was horror-stricken when I found how late I am," she cried. "I had to rush across the city on business. We were nowhere near a car line and the motor broke down. I could not get a taxi for ten minutes."

Cynthia led the way with the Cabinet officer, who had eyes for no one except his brilliant hostess. Cabot followed, escorting the Judge's gray-haired wife.

"I never saw Mrs. Pike before," began the lady with polite hesitation. "We exchanged calls but each time we happened to be out. Somehow," she added in a low tone, "I lost my breath for a moment as she entered. She looks so unlike a suffragist."

"What is your idea of a suffragist?" asked Cabot with a laugh.

Mrs. Hayden turned her kindly eyes upon him. "A person so radically unlike our hostess that I cannot put her into words."

"Then do you not stand for suffrage?"

"No." The lady's tone was one of quiet decision.

"Are you an anti?" persisted the Virginian.

"No, I am simply one of the millions of contented American women, upon whom suffragists hurl such blighting contempt. We fill a place like that of the great silent vote about which you politicians grow so violently anxious once in four years."

"Madame,"—Cabot turned to her with his

winsome smile,—“I am delighted that it fell to my lot to take you out to dinner. I have a mother who stands where you do.”

Over the wonderfully cooked and served meal Cynthia's guests forgot the long, awkward wait. She sat at the head of the table, Jane Hagner being opposite. Except where the Judge's wife plied an earnest conversation with Cabot, the hostess and the old lady from Oklahoma seemed to establish themselves as by some inherent right the chief figures of the feast. Occasionally one of the guests about the round table paused to listen to some gay shred of conversation, which floated past. Once the private secretary glanced away from the dull splenetic Flaherty to listen to a remark the Judge made to his wife.

“Anna,” he began, “before we go tonight I want you to ask Mrs. Hagner how she makes this watermelon pickle. I have not tasted anything like it for years. I believe I have almost emptied the dish.”

“Don't you know,” asked the lady with a laugh, “that watermelon is six months distant?”

“Never mind. Have your knowledge ready for the melon, and, my dear, I want you and Mrs. Hagner to become acquainted. She and I hail from the same little corner of old Vermont. You gave me great pleasure tonight, Mrs. Pike,” he added as he turned to his host-

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ess; "there is no State in our great Union for which my heart beats so warmly as our old rock-ribbed, pine-crested Vermont."

"If I hadn't," said Jane Hagner in a low tone, "fought it out with that graven image of a butler to set some of my watermelon pickle on the table, I might never have found out you were born in Stowe. Bradshaw calls watermelon pickle barbarous. The minute you said, 'This tastes like something Mother made when I was a little boy in Vermont,' I wanted to clasp hands with you."

"It is odd," said the grave-faced man, "how pomp and politics, fashion, wealth, and circumstance, every convention with which we build a fence about us, goes down instantly before a mere mention of the home of childhood."

The old woman by his side stared at the rose-heaped table through misty eyes, although a smile trembled about her mouth.

CHAPTER XXIX

A STARTLING GHOST

WHILE she bade Debonair good night, Cynthia turned aside to touch Jane Hagner's arm. "I've got to see you before you go to bed."

"Don't come nigh my room till Teenie gets me unhooked and unlaced. If a soul lays a finger on me I'll shriek."

"Chase along, then. Good-night," laughed Debonair. "I want ten minutes with Mother."

"Not tonight, Sonnie. You ought to have been in bed hours ago."

"Great Scott, Mother," blustered the boy, "you talk as if I were seven."

"Sometimes I wish, Debbie, you were seven." His mother kissed him fondly. "At seven you were the softest, sweetest, pinkest little cherub. Tonight,"—she held him off at arm's length and her lips trembled,—"it seems to me I can fairly see my boy changing into one of those pompadoured, *blasé* young chaps who float round town everywhere. I can't bear to think of that, Sonnie; it's paying too big a price."

The lad flung an arm about her neck.

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"Don't worry about me, you dear old mother. Old!" he repeated laughingly. "Why, tonight with that royal color in your cheeks you're so perfectly lovely and fascinating that I couldn't keep my eyes off you." He paused suddenly, while a wrinkle of terror flashed across his brow. "Mother, that Cabot man's in love with you!"

"Nonsense, son!" Cynthia laughed gayly. "What do you know about love, you who are not nineteen yet? Good-night, my dear, adorable, little Sonnie."

"Good-night," said the boy reluctantly. "Can I have that talk tomorrow?"

"I'll try to save time. There's a dinner somewhere, I think, but I'll come home early."

"You will, won't you? I can't get a minute with you alone. I'm jealous. Everybody gets your ear except me."

"I'll promise. Good-night again, son."

While Felice hung aside the discarded party gown, Cynthia slipped into a fleecy kimono and ran out to tap at Jane Hagner's door.

"Come in," called the old woman, who stood before a mirror brushing out her gray hair. "It's the last time that rat nest goes on my head. I wouldn't mind a switch made out of my own combin's, but that"—she tossed it aside contemptuously. "If 'twant so terrible late an' me so sleepy I'd wash my head."

"Jane Hagner," said Cynthia suddenly.

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"Sit down a minute. I want to speak to you."

The old woman pinned up her hair and dropped into a chair while she watched the Congresswoman move swiftly across the room to turn a key in the lock. Afterwards she peered into the empty bathroom and shut the door.

"For the land's sake, what's up? There ain't burglars round?"

Cynthia leaned her bare arms on the mantel and looked down into the anxious face.

"No," answered the younger woman abruptly. "Who do you suppose I met tonight?"

"Who?"

"Olympia."

"Good Lord!" Jane Hagner rose to her feet. "Where?"

"You heard me tell about our motor breaking down," began Cynthia hurriedly. "I was coming home from the South East, where I went to see Blair. I wanted a letter he had. He was not in. I waited a few minutes, then at half-past seven I gave up and we started for home. Alphonse drove at the very speed limit. It was raining, you know. A woman started from the sidewalk with an umbrella before her face. We thought she was going to stop. She didn't; the machine nearly touched her when I screamed, and she looked up, straight into my eyes. We were under the bright light at a corner. It was Olympia. She knew me. I

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never met such a look of hatred in a human face."

Cynthia shivered and muffled her arms in the caressing sleeves of her wrapper as one does who feels a chill creeping over her skin.

"Then?" asked Jane Hagner sharply.

Alphonse clutched the brake so suddenly that the machine was thrown on its haunches and something broke."

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. A crowd gathered. I asked two or three people about the woman. Nobody had seen her. She wore deep mourning."

"Beverly is dead then?"

"I don't know," confessed Cynthia slowly. "I don't seem able to think, still I talked and laughed, didn't I, the whole evening through?"

The old woman nodded.

"If Beverly is dead, or even if he isn't, Olympia has as much right to be in Washington as I have!"

"She has, only as I told your private secretary the other day, I feel about Olympia as I did about a monstrous snake they lost out of the circus when I was a little girl. I couldn't go into the pasture years after without a scared feelin' o' that thing rearin' up in front of me."

"How did you happen to speak about her to Miss Troup?" queried Cynthia curiously.

"She asked me."

"How odd!"

"I don't see that it was odd. The story went all over the country. More'n one person here's spoke to me about it."

"Just the same, it was queer of her to ask."

Cynthia crossed the room to a door which led out on a narrow stone balcony. She raised the shade and looked across the slumbering city. The rain had ceased, but the asphalt gleamed wet and dark as black ice, lit occasionally by long, white, shivering reflections from the opalescent lamp globes.

"I can't think, right off the bat, of anything to do. Can you?" asked Jane Hagner.

"No." Cynthia's voice was weary.

"We can't hunt down a woman who's guilty of nothing except savin' her husband from bein' lynched, can we? If he's dead—"

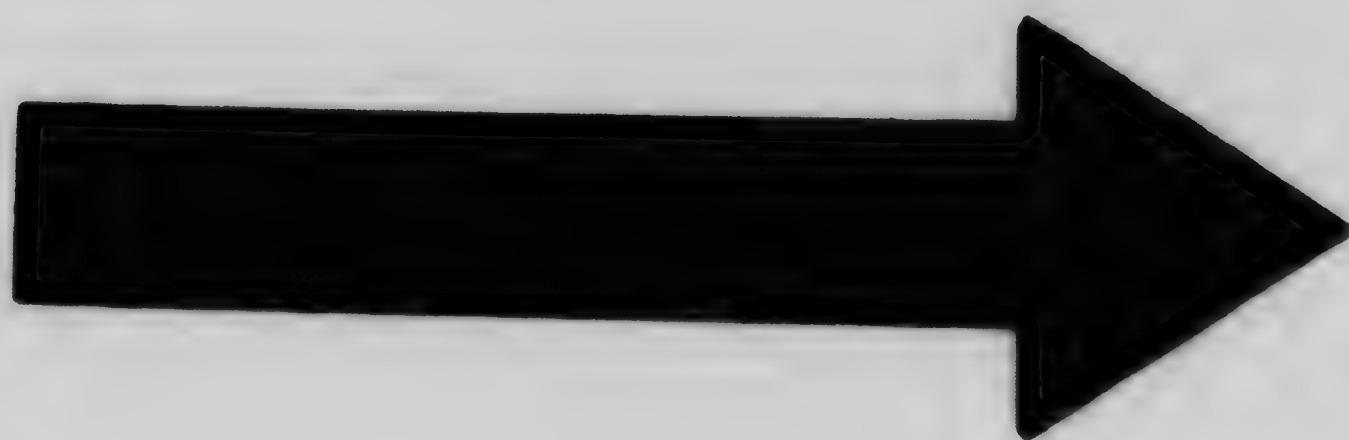
"Yes, if—"

"The same thought's in your head that's in mine. Somehow," added the old woman slowly, "it's always seemed to me as if the Almighty acted terrible deliberate about takin' men like Beverly to himself."

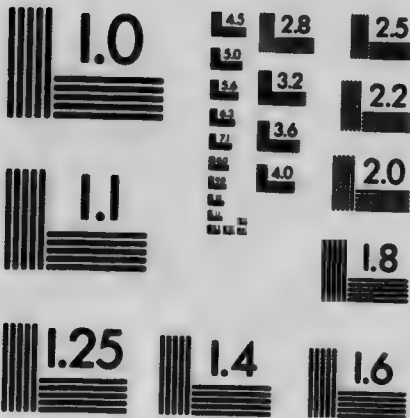
"If he isn't dead and she is here masquerading in widow's clothes, there is some—" Cynthia's voice trailed off into a shudder.

"Deviltry afoot," concluded the old woman.

"Yes, I don't feel as if I could face it. Life is so full now of everything."



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"Work pilin' up worse than usual?" queried Jane Hagner sympathetically.

"Not work, exactly. A woman's work in Congress does not count. It never will. If you could see my mail, basketfuls of it every day. There is not one encouraging, kindly, approving word among the letters. Generally they come from women who want something. Men do also, for that matter." Cynthia laughed bitterly. "It's all self—self—self. Women are worst. I can't put their fool bills through. I can't make food cheaper, or wages higher or the working day shorter or look after thousands who want to be taken care of. Taken care of—" she said slowly. "I have grown to hate the very phrase. Why don't people put their shoulders to the wheel and work? Oh, this being taken care of!"

Jane Hagner crossed the room hastily and drew Cynthia's face to her broad bosom as if comforting a child.

"Cry, Honey," she whispered. "Cry if you want to. Cry it all out. I know, you can't make a woman over, you've got to just take them as they are and the dear Lord knows there's an awful lot of half-baked, crazy fools among them. An' yet there's some of them, more than we know, I believe, who'd stand by a friend through anything, shoulder to shoulder, just as you or me would for one another.

Besides there's more sunshine in the world than clouds any old time."

Cynthia lifted her face and kissed the old woman's cheek.

"You set me on my feet every time," she confessed. "Now I can face any idiocy."

"What's the latest?"

"Today Congress agreed to allow a suffrage parade."

"Here in Washington?" asked Jane Hagner sharply.

"Yes, they call it a pageant. I *had* to put it through. Half the men, who voted to clear the streets for us, did so from pure chivalry. It's going to be too absurd for words; still, what can I do?" Cynthia set her teeth. "I heard a man at the House call me a quitter one night. If I dared, I would quit. I am ashamed to."

"How did Congress feel about the parade?"

"They let it go partly from straight courtesy, partly as a joke. They said it would be like a circus parade."

"That's exactly what it will be, with everything on deck but wild beasts. You're in it, I suppose?"

"Of course. I lead on a float posed as Liberty enlightening the world."

"My soul, how far does the thing go?"

"From the White House to the Capitol."

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"You'll be paralyzed before you go half that distance."

"No, they are very thoughtful. One of my arms is to be strapped down under bronze-colored draperies. I'll have a dummy arm to hold up the torch." Cynthia broke into a peal of hysterical laughter. "Some stupendous brain worked out the living pictures for these floats. There is Jack and Jill, only Jill stands firmly on the hill top, Jack has rolled to the foot. You don't escape. Oklahoma has deputed you to pose as the Old Woman who lived in a Shoe."

"Is that so?" A grim smile twisted Jane Hagner's face. "What is she supposed to stand for?"

"Your float is a protest. It controverts the race suicide idea. Too many babies are coming into the world."

"I see." Jane Hagner's big body shook with laughter.

"Those are a few of the exhibits; there will be forty of them."

"No wonder the men at the House said 'Yes.' They'll play truant that day or I miss my guess. Some o' them hain't had a chance at such fun since they crawled under a tent at the circus."

"We have had a day of it," retorted Cynthia. "Suffragists are pouring into town from all parts of the country. They accuse me of being lukewarm. I am not. I am cold. They stam-peded my office today. Blair has gone away

somewhere. He left a stenographer in charge and has hidden himself where he can work."

"Blair's got horse sense."

"Jane Hagner," asked Cynthia after a long silence, "do you know anything about Blair?"

"Nothin' except that he's honest as daylight."

"He is that." The Congresswoman spoke impatiently. "I mean do you know anything about his family affairs? He has a mother somewhere in Texas, he once told me that."

"What makes you curious? He hain't gone off and got married, has he?"

"Mercy, no." Cynthia laughed. "I was shocked to find where he lives, in the South East in a perfectly sordid neighborhood. It is a little brick house close to the sidewalk. Children swarm and shriek all over the street. The place smells horribly of cabbage and corned beef and onions and everything. Blair is such a fastidious chap, I don't see how he endures it. His landlady took me to his room; I could hardly believe he lived there. It is just big enough to sleep and dress in. It looks out on brick walls and a wretched little yard about so big." Cynthia stretched her arms far apart.

"Good land, it seems to me he might do better'n that even if livin' here does cost all outdoors."

"That is what I have been thinking," acknowledged the Congresswoman. "I can't un-

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derstand; Blair is not stingy. I feel guilty when I think of this vast house. Blair does the work while I draw the salary. I give him a thousand a year more than the government allows for a secretary."

"You do?"

"Yes, but if it is not enough—"

"Why don't you have a talk with him?"

"That is what I had in mind, still I hate to put into words what I have said to you."

CHAPTER XXX

THE ANONYMOUS FUND

"MRS. PIKE," John Blair laid a heap of typewritten sheets on the desk, "will you sign these letters, please? I can take care of everything else. We have cleaned up considerable work today."

"Yes."

"You look tired," suggested the young man while he watched her scribble her name across each page; "aren't you putting too much into twenty-four hours?"

"Of course, I am."

"Why don't you rest? Men, who do nothing except the work up here, go to pieces."

"The work up here?" repeated Cynthia.

"That is not wearing me out."

"You have accomplished a great deal."

"What has it amounted to?"

"That is not your fault."

The Congresswoman rested her elbows on the table and laid her eyes within the hollow of her hand.

"I am tired, Blair," she murmured, "dog-tired as they say down home."

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"I wish," began the man sympathetically, "that I could—"

"Make it easier for me?"

"Yes."

"Blair, when do you go home to dinner?" she asked irrelevantly.

"At any time," he smiled. "Dinner is a movable festival for me; I eat down town, at any time, anywhere." He seated himself before the desk and began to slide the letters into envelopes. "My landlady tells me she showed you up to my room last night?"

"Yes, I had no right to go." Cynthia's tone was an apology. "I wanted that Hastings letter. I suddenly remembered that it had not been answered."

"I took care of it yesterday before I went home."

"Thank you." Cynthia sat studying the face which loomed like a vigorous silhouette against the window. "Blair, may I have a talk with you? It is something rather personal," she explained hastily.

"Certainly." He wheeled about to face her. "I will do anything for you that lies in my power. You know that."

He waited for her to speak. The House office building had grown very still except for an occasional rush of hurried footsteps along the marble corridor.

"I feel," confessed the Congresswoman,

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"that I am not paying you as much salary as I ought to."

When Blair rose and crossed the room she looked up to meet his eyes. "Every penny of the seventy-five hundred a year that I get belongs to you."

"Nonsense," the man said brusquely.

"I don't earn one cent of it. You do the work, I am a figurehead."

"I will not take a dollar more than the salary I draw now. You have already been exceedingly generous. Few secretaries are so fortunate as I am."

"It is not enough for you to live on in Washington, everything here is so expensive."

"I imagine," said John Blair quietly, "you came to that conclusion after seeing my quarters."

"Let me talk to you, please, as if I were your mother," cried the woman impulsively. "Of course you are much older than Deb, still in some ways you are such a boy."

"Say anything you please."

"When I went home last night from your boarding-house, it hurt, it hurts yet."

"What?" he questioned bluntly.

"The difference! You understand. Don't make me put it into words."

"Mrs. Pike,"—the man's voice grew gentle.

"May I talk to you?"

"Oh, if you will," she began. "Let down

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the bars. I am not the Congresswoman, you are not the secretary, we are friends, simply friends."

"Thank you. What I am going to say has been on my mind for a long time. It is your right to know where I live, and why—"

"It is not my right," she protested.

"It *is* your right. You pay me a generous salary which is ample for a single man. I ought to live in a good part of the town and live well. My mother depends on me wholly. I have a widowed sister with several children. In a few years her eldest boy will be able to support her. He is an electrical genius. At present his education costs considerable money. I am carrying things for her until the boy is ready to take my place. After that it will be easier for me."

Cynthia did not speak. The secretary turned his eyes away and stared out at the window. The twilight had fallen and lights began to twinkle here and there about the city. He rose and stretched out his hand toward a lamp on the desk.

"Don't, don't," cried the woman. "Let me talk to you here in the twilight. You have made me see myself. I have millions, money I never raised a finger to earn, and what am I doing with it? I am simply existing, lapped in luxury, spoiling my boy, living a mad whirl of a life which does not even make me content."

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"You are not fair to yourself," said John Blair impulsively. "I see your generosity every day, you respond to a hundred calls from everywhere."

"Yes, but how?" she asked in a hopeless voice. "The day before Christmas, while Deb and I were strolling down F Street, we passed a girl, who stood beside a Salvation Army pot. It was bitterly cold. Her hands were drawn up inside her sleeves and she held them before her face to protect it from the wind. I was huddled in furs from head to foot. We were going to buy Christmas things and I had a purseful of money with me. I stopped and emptied it into her kettle except for one bill. I handed that to the girl. 'Buy clothes for yourself,' I said, 'warm, comfortable clothes.' Her eyes haunted me for days; she thanked me with them; she was too cold to speak."

"I have seen you do things like that ever since I met you."

"Oh," cried Cynthia indignantly, "you don't imagine I told you this because it is to my credit. It is the way I do things for people, probably they are not the right people and I do not help in the right way. Usually, I never see them again. I do not even know whether they need help or not."

"You put the woman into warm clothes and fed a hundred people, who on Christmas day would have gone hungry."

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"That was so little."

"Not for them," persisted the man.

"You do not understand. While I went through my district campaigning I used to think as I passed ugly, neighborless, little houses how I might make people happier and less lonely. It was all a jumble in my mind, but I felt sure I would find a way when I came to Washington. I can't."

Blair did not answer.

"I imagined legislation would help to make life easier and happier for people, who live out on the red dirt-roads as I once did. I thought I could get an education for boys and girls who wanted it, perhaps help them to face life. I dreamed such dreams, such ridiculous, useless dreams."

"There is one way to help." John Blair rose and began to pace the room with sudden energy. "Just one way. It must be purely individual and hand-to-hand."

"Yes," whispered Cynthia.

"When one gets hold of the right people, help them to make men and women of themselves, show them how to face life, teach them to do what they are fitted for; that is philanthropy. When a boy needs money as my nephew does, don't make a pauper of him. When he becomes a bread winner make him pay it back into some big general fund which can go on and on, giving a lift through endless generations to those who

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need it. There must be a heart back of it though, a big, human, kind, understanding heart. There must be tact, the sort of tact a woman possesses, and strength, and a large knowledge of the world."

"I understand," breathed the Congresswoman.

"You've got to keep a clutch on man pride, there's the secret in turning out good, capable, self-respecting men and women. A gift hurts. I have seen a man come whining for more, presently he expects it as a right, then he begins to deteriorate."

"Blair." The woman scanned the man's face critically. "Will you help and guide me with work like this?"

"Yes."

"First let me lift the load from your shoulders. There's the little nephew, he—"

"No," cried the secretary rebelliously, "no, you do not understand. The boy knows I have to go without things to give him a start. If his education came from a woman, who had so much money that its burden oppressed her, he will not deprive himself of anything to pay it back."

"Then," asked Cynthia hopelessly, "how can I help any one?"

"By making the fund anonymous. Charities tagged by a millionaire's name lose out. You will not get any glory in my way."

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"It is not glory I want. Can we start it at once?"

"Tonight?"

"Yes, tonight. When I go back in my memory I can pick out boys and girls or men and women who need a lift over the hard places, only I don't know how to set about helping them in any systematic way as you do." She laughed eagerly. "I am impulse, you are order."

"Exactly,"—Blair nodded,—"only we want a third party on this job. Some one, who has had experience in philanthropic work, who is broadminded and wise, who knows how to handle capital, whose very name lends authority to the work."

"Can you find some one like that?"

"Have you met Hector McLellan?"

"The banker?"

"Yes."

"He is the man exactly. Are you certain this is a wise move? It will take considerable money. Don't you think Forrest ought to be consulted?"

"No." Cynthia spoke impatiently. "Forrest has nothing whatever to do with this affair. He is hidebound in spots, he would hem and haw. I can't be bothered with him. Plan everything you have in mind. I will finance it immediately, only above all keep it quiet. I am so tired of begging letters.

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When the misery of the world comes to roost on my doorstep it takes the joy out of living."

Jane Hagner entered with a brief nod, and turned to Cynthia with a furrow of perplexity between her shrewd eyes as she dropped into a big arm chair.

"Did you tell Blair who you ran across last night?" she asked.

"No."

"Well, I'd advise you to. You need a man's counsel as well as mine. I reckon you can trust him."

A look of slow amazement crept into the secretary's face while he listened to Cynthia's story.

"What do you make of Olympia bein' in Washington?" asked Jane Hagner bluntly.

"I suppose she has a perfect right to come here if she wishes to, only—"

"It sets you wonderin', as it did us?"

"Yes, I do not know Mrs. Beverly well, but I saw enough to learn that she is a dangerous woman. She is more to be feared than her husband, ruffian as he was. He blunders when he strikes, she would not."

"You've got her down fine," the old woman looked at him keenly. "There ain't many recesses in Olympia's soul I hain't seen into. I've knowed her since she was knee high to a duck."

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"I don't see what she can do," Blair mused, "to hurt Mrs. Pike."

"There's mischief brewin' in another corner or I miss my guess," Jane Hagner's voice sank to a whisper. "Who do you suppose I met, ten minutes ago, in this buildin'?"

"Who?" An anxious wrinkle creased Cynthia's forehead.

"Major Guy Eric Ponsonby Troup."

The Congresswoman's face cleared and she broke into a peal of relieved laughter. "I thought you were going to say Beverly—"

"Laugh if you want to. I'd as lief meet Beverly as that evil-eyed old dago."

"Who is he?" asked Blair.

"The father of my social secretary. He is a broken-down diplomat and a silly old dandy, but as harmless—"

"As a scorpion," added Jane Hagner grimly.

"Or a June bug," laughed Cynthia. "Why should he want to hurt me? I have done nothing to offend him. I have even gone out of my way to offer him a courtesy as I did last night, when I invited him to dinner."

"Just the same," insisted the old woman obstinately, "he's goin' to ferret things out an' make trouble for you. I feel it in my bones."

"I have done nothing criminal, nothing to be ferreted out."

"What makes you suspect him?" asked Blair.

"Fifteen minutes ago I saw him sneak out o'

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Grebe's room; sneak's the only word for it. He peered up and down the corridor before he stepped out. He didn't see me, I stood back o' some excursionists. When I met him face to face and asked if he knew our friend Grebe, he smiled, that soft-soapy smile o' his that I despise an' he said, 'Who is Grebe? I never heard of him before.' "

"Are you sure he came from Grebe's room?" asked Blair.

"Sure! After I seed him safe out on the sidewalk I walked down the corridor to make sure. Grebe's name's on the door."

"It is the last room before you turn the corner," said John Blair.

"Yes, Cynthia introduced me to Grebe the first time I come here. He made us go into his room, don't you remember, to have a look at the view?"

The Congresswoman nodded. "I don't see what difference it makes to me if Major Troup is acquainted with Grebe. Hundreds of people float in and out of his room in the course of a day; Grebe is a man who holds a good deal of power in his hands."

"I know that, an' he ain't a friend of yours, is he?"

"No," acknowledged Cynthia; "he never misses a chance to let me know it."

CHAPTER XXXI

DEBONAIR'S ROMANCE

DEBONAIR pushed aside his plate at the breakfast table and glanced savagely at the immaculate Bradshaw, while he offered cakes.

"Take them away," growled the boy. "I loathe cakes, absolutely loathe them." He rose and walked to the window.

"Got a bilious attack, Sonnie?" asked Jane Hagner cheerfully.

"No."

"You'd ought to be at school or at work or something that's discipline," began the old woman severely. She turned to Mrs. Pike, who sat hidden behind a morning paper. "Cynthia," she said abruptly.

"Yes." The Congresswoman dropped her paper and glanced up with a smile. "Are you two quarreling again?"

"No. This boy's bound to get into mischief, of one kind or another, if you don't set him to work. It's scandalous to think of an eighteen-year-old boy wanderin' about with his pockets full o' money in this crazy fool city."

"Crazy fool city, Aunt Jane; what do you

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mean?" Debonair planted himself in front of her aggressively, while his face flushed with anger.

"Exactly what I say, it's a crazy fool city, with hundreds of boys and girls round loose, who have more money'n they know what to do with and God help them, if there's no reins on them."

"What a blamed fuss about something you've gone blind batty on," observed the boy nonchalantly. "Don't stir Mother up, I'm having the time of my life."

"That's it exactly." Jane Hagner folded her napkin and rose to her feet.

"I want to talk to Mother alone," said the boy.

"You may." The old woman left the room.

"Deb, that was a cruel thing to say," protested Cynthia. "Jane Hagner loves you as if you were her own boy."

"I want to talk with you," he burst out hotly. "I've been trying to get alone with you for weeks and—"

"I know, Sonnie." There was a hopeless tone in the woman's voice. "I don't know where time goes. I simply can't get free from engagements, they grew and grew instead of getting fewer when Lent came, as Miss Troup said they would. Then there's the suffragists, the city is packed full of them. Every hour of the day they want something."

"It's about Miss Troup, Mother. I want to speak to you."

"Yes," she went on heedlessly, while she lifted her paper, "wait just ten minutes, won't you, Sonnie? When Jane Hagner and you interrupted me, I was reading about a bill which came up before the House yesterday. I was not there and I *must* know something about it. Let me finish, then—"

"All right." The boy turned away and stared sulkily out of the window. He stood drumming on the glass when his mother rose and crossed the room to smooth his hair caressingly.

"Now, Sonnie." She laughed and glanced at a watch she had pulled from her belt. "I can give you exactly ten minutes."

"Oh, I say, that isn't as much as you hand out to a pie-counter constituent. I want an hour, half an hour, anyway."

"Deb, dear, I *must* go. These confounded suffragists are waiting for me at their headquarters. They want help and money for their parade. I promised to go yesterday. I didn't and they were furious."

"After that, where are you due?"

"I must be in my seat at the House when the roll's called. I am not paired on this tariff vote."

"I suppose,"—the boy's face clouded,—"I might as well adopt a mother."

"Adopt a mother! What do you mean?"

"I don't get much mothering these days, do I?" He laughed mirthlessly.

"Sonnie." Mrs. Pike drew the boy's face against her cheek. "Pretty soon we'll go home and have a glorious summer together, or if work slackens we can run up to Atlantic City for a week or two and get acquainted." She laughed gaily.

"Get acquainted, that's good. Well, go along."

"Was it money you wanted, Deb?"

"No, it was not money." A rebellious tone crept into the lad's voice. "You seem to think money is the only thing I need."

She patted his cheek while she buttoned up her coat. "I'm going to turn over a new leaf. Come home for dinner, son. I was going to the Hollands' tonight but I'll send regret and stay here with you. Good-by, Debby." She kissed him lingeringly.

A frown crept in between his eyes as he stood beside the window watching the motor descend the long hill. He lit a cigarette, and puffed it in gloomy silence while the butler cleared off the table.

"Bradshaw," he asked suddenly, "is Miss Troup in?"

"Yes, sir, she came half an hour ago with her father. She is in the little study, I fancy."

Debonair tossed the half-smoked cigarette into the fireplace and strode hurriedly from the

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room. When he tapped at the study door the Major flung it open with a complacent smile.

"Delighted, my dear boy," cried the man effusively. "It is such a pleasure to see you. It stirs an old man's blood to catch a glimpse of your buoyant, carefree, happy youth. Mine lies so far in the past, with so much sorrow between, so much heartbreak and failure! When a young Adonis like you bursts upon my vision—"

"I see," answered Debonair carelessly. The Major's heroics slipped past his ears unheeded. He had eyes for no one except the girl, who sat before a desk opening letters. As she met his gaze a pink flush swept across her cheeks. He saw her forehead wrinkle in disdain while she glanced at her father.

"Your vigor and lightheartedness," persisted the old man, "brings back to memory the golden forenoon of life with its gladness and wild bubbling joys. Although it saddens, it—"

"Father," interrupted Miss Troup, "here is a letter you must answer."

"Yes, my darling," the old man crossed the room with swift footsteps.

"It is about that little bungalow in the Cumberland Mountains you talked of renting for August. You must decide about it."

"Can't you do it, dear, I am so busy—"

"Busy—at what?" asked the girl peremptorily.

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"My child,"—he laughed gaily,—“don't you understand my foolish little jokes? Where is it? I shall answer it immediately.”

The secretary tossed over a heap of letters, which lay on the desk. “It came in the morning mail. I had it in my hand a second ago. Here it is.”

While she sat reading it, Debonair saw the old man's eyes rove curiously about the littered desk, then pause with a stare of blank astonishment. Instantly he pulled himself together and laid his hand upon the girl's shoulder.

“Shall we rent the little sky perch?” he asked tenderly.

“As you wish.” She slipped the letter back in the envelope and handed it to him.

“I fear it is the only thing we can afford.”

“It is for you to decide.” The secretary rose and turned her back upon him while she searched for a volume in the bookcase.

“My one desire,” he said appealingly, “is your comfort, dearest, and your pleasure. It is too hot to stay in Washington during August.”

He stood twirling the envelope idly between his fingers. It fell among the heap of mail upon the desk. He searched for a second through the letters, then picked it up and put it in his pocket.

“Will you be in this afternoon, Durward?” he asked suavely as he stood in the doorway.

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"Except from three to five. Why?"

"You asked me to bring a little address book, you remember?"

"Yes," the girl turned away coldly. "Leave it with the servant if I am not here."

"Good-by, darling." There was a lingering caress in his voice.

"Good-by."

When the last echo of his footsteps died away on the stair, the young secretary turned to Debonair with a curious anxiety in her voice.

"Mr. Pike, did my father ever borrow money of you?"

"What a perfectly ridiculous question!"

"It is not ridiculous. Tell me the truth."

"The merest trifle, a taxi fare or something like that."

"How often? How much?"

"Oh," cried Debonair impatiently, "forget it. Every gentleman runs up against a penniless moment when—"

"Yes, and a gentleman pays back. Has my father paid you?"

"It was not worth paying," answered the boy stubbornly. "Why, it's too paltry even to discuss."

"Perhaps." Miss Troup laid a cool palm against her flushed cheeks. "Only you must promise me one thing, or we cannot be friends."

"What?" asked the lad dubiously.

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"That you will never loan my father another dollar."

"Oh, say!" protested Debonair; "that's a measly thing to make a fellow promise."

"You must. Give me your hand on it." She stretched out her slim white fingers with an entreating gesture.

The boy caught her hand between his own and leaned across the desk.

"Sweetheart," he cried, "what's the use of me seeing you day after day and trying to be merely polite to you? It's such a farce! You know I love you with all my heart and soul. There is no use of you saying, 'No.' I will not listen. I know every word that's coming, that I am a boy, that I don't know what I want or what I am talking about, it is perfectly—"

"Debonair,"—the girl stifled a sob,—"let me go, you do not know how strong you are, you hurt me." He stared at her defiantly as he dropped her hand.

"You've *got* to love me. I will make you love me. You led me on with smiles and all your sweet bewitching ways, for weeks and weeks. Didn't you?" he insisted remorsefully.

"Don't. Oh, my God, don't!" The girl dropped her elbows on the desk and hid her face. When she raised her eyes they were full of tears. "If I did," she confessed in a low voice, "I did not mean anything."

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"You did not mean anything?" implored the lad. "Even that night when you allowed me to kiss you, you did not mean anything?"

"No," she murmured.

"I understand," he cried eagerly, "you are afraid of Mother. You don't know her. Let me get a license today, tomorrow we will go to Baltimore or somewhere, I don't care where, and get married. Afterwards I'll call Mother up over the phone and tell her. I tried to break it to her this morning. I couldn't. She was on the dead rush as usual. Dearest,"—the boy leaned over her caressingly,—"say you will marry me."

The young secretary did not raise her eyes.

"I want you to care for me for myself alone," faltered Debonair, "not because I can give you the sort of home you deserve or because Mother's a rich woman and I will have what she has some day. It makes me hot,"—he began to stride the room in a blind fury,—"when I see you take orders from Mother and Jane Hagner to say nothing of those high-nosed old guys who come here. Yesterday I rushed out of the house. I couldn't stand it another minute. I wanted to kill half a dozen people. Darling,"—he paused and touched her hair timidly with one hand,—"look up at me. I'm dead in earnest,—I'm terribly in love with you. Mrs. Hagner bullyrags me and Mother leaves me to myself. I have nobody in the world to

care where I go or what I do. Can't you see?" he pleaded.

The girl rose to her feet and laid her hand upon the lad's arm. He clasped it between his own and flashed a quick grateful smile at her.

"Debonair," she said, "you tell me I could make a man of you. I wish I could, dear, but I cannot do it by marrying you. That would blast your future. And yet, I have grown so fond of you—"

"Oh," he interrupted impetuously, "I knew it—"

"Listen." A quiet tone in the girl's voice made him look into her eyes with a swift glance of fear. "I *am* fond of you, you have been kind to me, and loyal and manly. You have believed in me and defended me."

"By Jove, why shouldn't I?" he blurted out. "You are brave and splendid and independent and so lovely and dear. Any man who wouldn't take your part is a brutal cad."

"Don't, please, Deb, make it harder for me to say what I want to. You are not quite nineteen?"

The boy squared his shoulders and looked at her with splendid importance. "I will be nineteen next month."

"And next week," said the girl, "I will be twenty-seven."

"Nonsense, don't tell me such a fool thing as that. I don't believe it," he protested.

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"All you're trying to do is to make it harder for me." He glanced at her defiantly, then went tramping impetuously about the room. "What if you are?" he cried as he stopped before her. "A few years do not count when people love each other. You don't look a day older than I am. Besides," he faltered, "it would be all the better. I need some one who can steady me and make me bone down to work. I would put all my heart into it if I were working for some one I love as much as I do you."

"Work at what, Deb?" she asked gently.

The lad squared his shoulders. "I will start in at anything you ask me to do."

"Deb, please,"—the secretary pushed out one hand as if to hold him at a distance,—“do you know if I were to take you at your word, you would never forgive me as long as I live?"

"For what?" he demanded.

"If I married you," she whispered.

"I will never forgive you if you don't."

The girl smiled piteously and shook her head.

"You have not faced the world as I have, Debonair. You don't know men and women as I do. You do not realize what they would say about me."

"Who cares," sneered the lad, "for this nasty, little, scandalous, old world?"

"Each one of us does. We *have* to. You must listen." The secretary was trying to steady her voice. "First of all it would say,"

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—she watched him narrowly,—“that I came here as a secretary, simply to lay a trap for you and your mother's millions.”

“If it did I would smash its teeth down its throat,” cried the boy wrathfully.

“Then,” she continued, “it would point its finger of scorn at both of us. Gray hairs and wrinkles would come to me far sooner than they would to you, years sooner. You are such a boy, Deb.” She smiled wanly. “You will be a boy when you are fifty. Besides, you would tire of me. Then—” her voice sank to a husky sob.

“Tire of you?” Debonair snatched her fiercely into his arms and laid her face against his cheek. “Say, give me the chance to tire, won't you?”

“Don't,” she pleaded as she unclasped his hand from her waist. “Don't, it is so hard to make you understand. You don't want to understand. Why, it is almost funny.”

“Funny?” he demanded with a gasp of rage.

“You confessed in almost as many words a little while ago that you needed mothering.”

“Nonsense.” A wave of scarlet blazed to the roots of Debonair's yellow hair.

“And I.” Miss Durward-Troup dropped on a sofa beside the window and laid her face upon her arms. “I—oh, Debonair!” She laughed unsteadily. “I need fathering.”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE UNVARNISHED TRUTH

THE suffrage parade was over and each woman who had taken part in it had a story to tell of insults offered along the line of march, of being impeded by a hoodlum crowd or facing shouts of derision. The Senate had called an investigation and meetings were being held to gather evidence.

"I hate the tumult," cried Cynthia when over the phone came an imperious demand that she appear at a meeting in the Netherdale ballroom. "Why don't they take their medicine and keep still? Women are working themselves into a state of lunacy. I see them rushing about town in a wild-eyed frenzy. I wonder what their homes are like."

"Fit, I reckon," answered Jane Hagner, "to drive a man to drink."

"What on earth," queried Cynthia, "can be done to head them off?"

"Just one thing," suggested the old woman calmly; "find them some other distraction. If we could dangle a brand-new whim before their eyes and one old bell-wether leaped the fence,

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the whole wobble-minded flock would follow at her heels."

"Yes, only—they would go crazy over that." The Congresswoman sighed. "I believe I'll send regrets to their indignation meeting."

"You'd better not. It cooks your goose if you do."

"Let my goose cook." Cynthia's voice grew rebellious. "The game is not worth the candle; it's burning up money, energy,—life itself."

"We can't stop to debate that now," cried the old woman. "It's most eight o'clock."

While Jane Hagner waited in front of the sumptuous apartment house, she watched a crowd surge in at the wide door. A woman passed, wrapped from head to foot in priceless fur, followed by two negroes, who glanced about with an occasional giggle or an airy toss of their heads. Old women with faces wearing a serious quiet flushed with triumph, moved beside groups of chattering girls, who aired their opinions like flippant young demagogues. The ball-room was filled to the doors and women rushed about clamoring for chairs. Men sauntered out from the dining room to watch the scene with keen interest.

"Young man,"—the eyes of one fidgety woman fell upon a smiling lad,—"bring us chairs. Don't loaf around sneering and scoff-

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ing while women have to stand. Find some chairs immediately."

"Don't," commanded Jane Hagner when a boy beside her started courteously to his feet. "Set right where you are. I shan't allow you to bring a single chair."

"Why?" blazed the flurried woman beside her.

"Because," answered Mrs. Hagner calmly, "it's defraudin' us of our rights. Totin' chairs is a man's job and I am not goin' to be cheated out of one of my privileges. Here, you girls, come along an' help. I'll scare up the chairs, you give me a hand at bringin' them in. No," she added decisively when a few men protested. "You go away back an' sit down where you belong. We're simply claimin' our rights."

As Cynthia entered the hall, she stared in blank astonishment at twenty or thirty girls marching past with cane-seated chairs held high above their heads. At the front of the line stepped Jane Hagner wearing an impressive solemnity, which accorded oddly with the twinkle in her eye.

"I would rather not take a seat on the platform," objected Cynthia to the wife of a Colorado Senator, who was acting as chairman. "I caught cold in the parade. I don't feel certain of my voice."

"My dear," cried the lady sympathetically, "may I add you to my list? I intend to read a

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roll of honor tonight, the names of two hundred women, who are lying ill, many of them strangers in our midst, who were taken to hospitals prostrated by pneumonia, bronchitis or nervous exhaustion brought on by the treatment we received. And," she added indignantly, "our reward was the derision of a hooting mob."

"Still it was not the hooting mob you were trying to impress," suggested the Congresswoman.

"Perhaps not," answered the lady from Colorado doubtfully.

"I want you," said Cynthia hastily, "to know Mrs. Hagner of Oklahoma. Before you were born, she stood for our cause, almost alone in the Southwestern wilderness."

"I am so glad to meet you." The chairman turned to the old woman rapturously. "Besides I want to congratulate you upon that brilliant idea about the chairs. So few of us carry out a thought when it flashes into our minds. It generally comes too late to be put into execution."

"I don't know about that," answered Jane Hagner slowly. "It seems to me there's considerable bein' put into execution."

"Considerable," granted the Senator's wife; "only an inspiration like yours demonstrates what we aim for. Won't you come on the platform," she added eagerly, "and talk to us tonight?"

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"About what?"

"The cause, any phase of it you choose. Tell us about the early days, so few are left who remember them. Such a story must be interesting, inspiring, thought-compelling."

"A good, plain, straight-from-the-shoulder talk? I want you to know I'm no oratorical windmill."

"Yes, a good, plain talk." The chairman smiled delightedly. "That is exactly what we want. Women like you are the ribs and backbone of the party."

"I'm not dead certain about that." Jane Hagner spoke dubiously.

The Senator's wife turned to a tall, vivacious woman, who stood beside her. "Miss Clapham," she implored, "help me persuade Mrs. Hagner to talk to us tonight."

"You'll be a perfect old dear if you will," gurgled Miss Clapham; "no one is scheduled for a speech. We have nothing in mind except to take evidence for the investigation. There will be an empty half hour left after that. Why!" She paused as she peered through a lorgnette into the old woman's face. "Aren't you the lady who was to have been the Old Woman who lived in a Shoe and who relinquished the part so gracefully?"

"Yes, the same fat old party. Don't feel delicate about referring to it. I own up to most two hundred pounds. It wasn't any sudden

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streak of politeness that made me give up my place to the lady from Indiana, who hankered for it." Mrs. Hagner's face wrinkled into a genial smile. "You'd forgot to take my measure before buildin' the shoe. When it come to climbin' in, I stuck in the mouth of it."

"It was horribly unfortunate!" mourned Miss Clapham.

"Don't think so for one minute!" Jane Hagner's voice became aggressively cheerful. "I got on a front seat in Pennsylvania Avenue and saw the parade from start to finish."

"You did?" exclaimed the Senator's wife. "Then you ought to prove a most valuable witness. So far as we know, you are the only one of us, who looked on. You saw disgraceful scenes?"

"I certainly did. I saw disgraceful scenes," answered the old woman emphatically.

"You are going to talk to us?" cried a chorus of voices.

"If you insist on it an' I can speak out everything that's on my mind."

"Fine!" The Senator's wife beamed on the circle around her.

"Till you're ready for me, let me set beside Mrs. Pike. I've got to collect my thoughts. It's years since I've stepped on a platform."

Jane Hagner watched the scenes before her with intent quiet. Once or twice the excitement threatened to develop into an absolute frenzy

as one suffragist after another rose to tell of epithets hurled at her by gaping hoodlums, of tomato juice splashed on snowy robes, of "big brutes, who called themselves men," whimpered one hysterical creature, "who said we ought to be at home over a wash-tub." There were stories of small boys, who had pulled the tail of a trumpeter's horse or climbed into the golden chariot of a modern Boadicea. It was a rehearsal of disorder, heart burnings and frustrated hopes. The audience began to subside into recrimination and tears when the Senator's wife called upon Jane Hagner.

"We have with us tonight," she announced "a woman to whom our modernism must look strange. During her young womanhood, when our cause was in its infancy, she was one of the most vigorous and wisest mothers suffrage has ever known."

Everywhere about the hall women rose to their feet and men, who were sauntering through the lobby, crowded round the door.

When the Senator's wife nodded at her to mount the platform, the old woman felt her heart throb during one terrified moment. As she stood beside the smiling chairman and looked across the thronged room, the pride and confidence in Cynthia's face swept terror aside.

"Mrs. Hagner will take us back to the days of her early womanhood, when she lived in the Southwestern wilderness, thirty-six years ago.

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She will tell us how the glad message of freedom to our sex was first wafted to her." The chairman loved the sound of her own complacent voice, and wandered on through long, meaningless sentences.

Jane Hagner began, quietly, impressively, slowly, to sketch conditions old settlers faced on the unbroken prairies. It was a life filled with hardship, and self-abnegation, a life set far apart from stirring events in the outer world. She told of a woman, who rode across the desert, to carry the doctrine of suffrage among widely scattered homes, and of how it had been taken up with simple enthusiasm and faith, spreading like some new religion through the wilds of Indian Territory.

A flutter of fans and whispers ceased as the deep insistent voice of the woman gathered strength and confidence. Few of her listeners knew anything of the strenuous life she described, most of them were mere butterflies of fashion; still the story, told in homely language, rang so true with its rugged picturesqueness that unimaginative minds saw visions of women gathered together in a smoky sod house adding their feeble efforts to the tide, which decades later, was to sweep the country.

Jane Hagner paused abruptly when her audience broke into a thunder of applause.

"I spoke of a tide," she began thoughtfully. "I reckon I didn't know much about tides."

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Sometimes I have a feelin',"—she hesitated for a moment as if searching in her mind for a simile,—“that I'm like the little boy, who punched a hole in one o' them Dutch dykes that they built to keep out the ocean. He set by lookin' at the water trickle out. At first there wan't nuffin more'n he could have lapped up; but the hole kep' growin' an' growin' till there was considerable of a stream. He clapped his hand over the leak an' started to holler for help. 'Twan't nuffin use. He couldn't keep the tide back. Then he ran. The last seen of him he was leggin' it for dear life with the hull Atlantic Ocean at his heels. That's the way,” explained the old woman abruptly, “I feel sometimes about suffrage. The awful part of it is, the boy, who punched the hole 'n the dyke, wan't the only one who was swept off when the Atlantic come roarin' in.”

She stood for a moment in silence, watching the women turn their eyes away to gaze at each other in mute perplexity.

“I've got you women here,” she continued, “an' I want you to listen, even if you don't agree with me. Men set still and hear themselves scalped without raisin' a yap. You're frettin' against what you call the thralldom of sex; in that's so, act now as men would. One ant come out with the statement that our parade was a blazin' indiscretion. I'm not dead sure but she was right. While I looked on at that

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fool parade, I felt pretty much like the young one, who set the Atlantic Ocean free. Mine was one of the hands that made a hole in the dyke, I confess to that. Only it wan't given me to look into the future. The spirit of thirty-six years ago ain't no more like your goin's-on in this twentieth century than our modern world's like Puritan New England.

"In them days home come *first* an' suffrage was a side issue. We did the work that was up to us and wouldn't be side-stepped. We made the best o' what we had and just kep' hopin' for better days. We bore children cheerfully and lovin'ly. We reared them as tenderly an' wisely's we knew how, toilin' for them from mornin' till night with never a thought that such toil was a hardship or an injustice. Our highest ideal, I reckon, was to make home the happiest, cleanest, most comfortable, most comfortin' place on earth. You women wouldn't call that a very high ideal, only the modernistic female hadn't been heard of in them days. When we did give a thought to a wider horizon openin' up for our daughters and granddaughters, we would have shuddered with horror if we could have looked into the future an' seen what's come with the larger opportunities we dreamed about.

"Today a fearful percentage of you restless, discontented women are standin' on the edge of lunacy. When 'tain't as bad's that, it's snarled

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nerves or straight hysteria. I've seed the same thing at a nigger revival when some crazy loco of a preacher licked himself into a dripping sweat, callin' on folks to come to the Lord. "That ain't religion," cried the old woman scornfully. "I've seed religion, I've lived with it; good, honest brand of it, and I know, thank God! The ferment that's workin' in you women, who stand at street corners shrieking for suffrage, is the identical same tantrum that got into some poor, half-witted, whimperin' convert as they called him, that a fool revivalist whipped up on the penitent bench. You women want to stop and think, and think hard!"

She stopped. A low mutter of revolt ran through the audience. Here and there a woman rose and shook a clenched hand at the speaker. She watched flaming, angry faces everywhere. A sibilant hiss grew until it sounded like the escaping of steam. Jane Hagner had laid a match to a gunpowder train and feminine resentment was blazing into hot flame.

Suddenly a man's deep commanding voice spoke from near the door. "Sit down, keep quiet, I tell you, keep quiet. We don't want a panic. You have threshed out your side of the question and we have listened to *you*. Now let people who want to listen to the other side, do so. Proceed, madame," he added politely.

Jane Hagner turned to him with a grateful nod, and then continued:

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"I knew you wouldn't like what I had to say. Only I was pressed into service by your chairman." She glanced at the Senator's wife, who sat watching her with frightened eyes. "She said I could talk for half an hour. I reckon I can squeeze in all I've got left to that time. A few minutes ago you wan't doin' as you'd fain be done by. You turned like a fury on folks on the Avenue because they didn't agree with you. Wan't you givin' me the treatment you objected to yourselves? Remember," she pleaded, "'tain't a man that's lambastin' you. It's one woman talkin' to another, an old woman, who knows the worst an' the best of her own sex. You're all stirred up over that fool parade, only you wan't to blame half as much as the monumental donkey that cooked up the freak idea. If you know who she is, you'd ought to take her out behind the barn an' dress her down with a buggy whip. I had my opinion of her, I can tell you, as I set and watched you strut past. When you come to a halt an' set free your dove o' peace after all the scrappin' an' the little picayune jealousies you'd been indulgin' in, it was enough to throw every wooden Indian along the street into a giggle. I don't suppose you've heared where your dove lighted down, only I reckon the papers got ahead of it with their story of tumult an' heart-burnin'. If you'd a grain o' humor in you, you'd have cut out that dove business.

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There were other things in the parade besides the dove that makes the country set back an' do some thinkin'. You say your little army o' lame, halt an' blind was in a state o' collapse at the end of the route. 'Twan't no place for lame, halt, an' blind! The mob o' termagant females marchin' under a banner marked 'Socialists' wan't exactly what I'd call a safe exhibit. Have you studied the history of Socialism? Do you know what it leads to? Why didn't you put out a float with Charlotte Corday gazin' through her prison bars or some other female of her stripe that's tried to sizzle down through history as a martyr? You'd all be wary about stirrin' up gunpowder. 'Tain't much more dangerous than hookin' arms with Socialists. You complain that bricks were thrown at four women, who carried a banner acknowledgin', 'We stood at Armageddon.' Do you wonder? Every decent citizen ought to try and forget Armageddon."

Jane Hagner paused to glance at the clock.

"There's ten minutes left," she continued. "I'm goin' to fling the whip aside now an' talk to you as one woman to another. For the love of our homes an' our country an' our children, won't each one o' you go home tonight an' do some thinkin'? How many of you really care a whoop for the welfare o' women? You talk o' posterity an' givin' posterity its political freedom! What's political freedom goin' to

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amount to if you mothers hand down snarled nerves, memories of a home where neglect an' ferment an' agitation reigned supreme, where a father was condemned as a tyrant or a weak-lin', where a daughter was taught to look at her brother an' the whole masculine sex as her born enemies? That sort o' thing's goin' down and down through generations, so it seems to me almost like some strain o' disease. You know it as well as I do but you don't dare face it or—confess it.

"Ahead o' wealth or honor or power come home an' the happiness of home, your duty to the man you made a vow to, an' the children you've brought into the world. You think you can do this, an' rush round agitatin' suffrage into the bargain. You can't. You're bitin' off more'n you can chew. If you bring up a future voter, who'll do his duty as ably and honestly as he knows how an' train a daughter to take up a woman's job—an' believe me it's as noble as any job God hands out—then you're a power an' not the near-imbecile you say you're likened to. I heard one fool, a man you lassoed into your ranks—you see I allow there are some fool men—say he unconsciously holds his mother in such contempt as to class her with convicts or imbeciles—until she gets a vote. My soul! do you know what you are doing to our cause—for I still call it our cause—when you take in a man that's capable of sayin' sich a thing as that

just to give him five cents' worth o' cheap notoriety?

"Are any of you willin' to turn back an' stand with the few of us, who believe in old-fashioned peace an' womanliness? If there are some, who aren't ashamed to allow we made a mistake somewhere back an' begin again, I'm ready to step alongside of you. If I've got to give up every shred o' dignity I hang onto an' dress up like a circus performer, or preach from a cart tail on the street, just to get what's comin' to me, or spend any time racin' all over creation wavin' a banner, or spoutin' high falutin' speeches that I don't understand and don't have a mite o' faith in, then—" the old woman's voice choked huskily—"then I reckon we've come to the partin' of the ways. I'm goin' home. Thank God, there's a home for me, even if my ideals are tumblin' round my head. I'm goin' home to clasp loving hands held out to welcome me. I'll try to forget what I've seen here, the unrest that's leading to shattered nerves an' broken homes. There ain't no woman of you goin' back with me, is there—"

A longing, hopeful appeal lit Jane Hagner's face while her eyes swept the elegantly gathered crowd in front of her. Here and there a woman rose hesitatingly to her feet, but no one came to meet her in the aisle. With Cynthia at her side she walked through the silent audience.

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In the lobby, men pushed forward to grip her hand with an eager pressure. Among them came a tall, serene-faced gentleman with snow-white hair and quiet eyes.

"Madame," he said, "I want the honor of shaking your hand. I have faced the smoke of battle many times in my life. I have seen men do signal acts of bravery. Tonight I realize what bravery means among women. More than once, I have come to a place in war where it took more courage to go back than to march forward."

"Who was he?" asked Jane Hagner as the motor sped up a long hill.

"That was General Oakes."

"General Oakes!" repeated the old woman. "I suppose," she added with a queer break in her voice which was neither a sob nor a chuckle, although it sounded suspiciously like both, "I suppose that's what Deb would have called 'some compliment.'"

"It certainly was." Then Cynthia laughed unsteadily.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CONGRESSWOMAN FACES CALUMNY

JANE HAGNER sat with a pen between her fingers and her eyes turned idly upon a remnant of orchard, which the builders had left undisturbed. A flush of peach blossom, the snowfall covering a crab-apple tree, and a haze of leafage, had filled the old woman with an intense longing for home, a longing which crept into her daily letter despite every effort to be gay. When she closed her eyes, she could see a yard beside the little house in Oklahoma. In one corner, fine, green quills of lily of the valley were thrusting themselves up through the dirt, in a pansy bed that lay close by, velvety blossoms were basking in the sunshine. A sob threatened to choke her. She gulped it down and returned to finish an absurd story about a Congressional club tea.

"Aunt Jane!" cried Debonair, as he burst into the room without knocking.

"What, Sonnie?" Mrs. Hagner laid down her pen and rose to meet the boy, who seemed half incoherent with fright. "What's happened? You act as if the bottom had fallen out of the universe."

"It has," he cried passionately; "read that." He pulled a paper from his pocket and thrust it into her hand, then stared gloomily at the blossoming orchard.

"Why in the devil," he begun hoarsely, "should Mother have—"

"Debonair Pike," the old woman wheeled round sharply. "You didn't imagine, did you, for one minute that there was a mite of truth in this? You—her own flesh an' blood—to go back on her!"

"There it is in black and white," whispered the boy.

"Shucks! I hain't read it half through nor got the sense of it, only I know this, it's as neat a piece of lyin' as I ever come up against."

"Then,"—the tears rolled down the boy's face unchecked,—"you don't think it's true?"

"Why on earth should your mother stoop to touch any dirty work for two million dollars? If she was poorer than Peter Patch's turkey, she wouldn't do it. As it is, she's got more money spoutin' out of the ground than she knows how to spend, more than's good for her or—for you either. Besides, she hasn't a grapping, stingy bone in her body." The old woman laughed impatiently. "It's the most ridiculous, cooked-up mess of blackguardism I ever set my eyes on. Set down, an' keep still, Deb Pike. I want to read it clear through."

The boy leaned over her shoulder with his

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eyes bent on the front page of a scurrilous publication, which had driven more than one man and woman to their graves by charges of graft and dishonor. Across the top of the sheet flared tall head-lines, and the photograph of a check made payable to Cynthia Pike from the Central Oil Company. It sought to insinuate that her vote on the Grebe Bill had earned her a bounty of two million dollars. The story was craftily worded. It was not a charge, rather a call upon the Congresswoman to come out in the open and explain why one lone vote should be worth so tremendous a price. Following it came the statement that Mrs. Pike was engaged to Stephen Cabot, with an insinuation that the money might have been the price of two votes instead of one.

"Mother isn't going to marry that mutt, is she?" faltered Debonair.

"Don't you worry, son. She's not letting sich news dribble out through a villainous little sheet like this. It's a piece with all the rest. Anybody with half an eye can tell who cooked it up." A grim smile hovered about Mrs. Hagner's mouth.

"Who?"

"Olympia Smythe's done rat-gnawin' jobs like this since—"

"Olympia Smythe?" The lad turned his startled eyes upon her. "How could she have done that?" He pointed to the accusing story.

"You knew she was here in town, didn't you?"

"No. Where? When did you find out? Why didn't you slam her into jail?"

"Sonnie, don't let loose on me like that; I thought your mother had told you. We've done all we can to find her. It's no use. Maybe she ain't here any longer. As for slamming her into jail, that's fool talk! Beverly earned his diploma to get into some nice comfortable State's prison for life, but Olympia hain't—yet. Where's your mother?"

"I don't know. Do you suppose she's seen—this?" he asked between set teeth.

"More'n likely. News o' this kind goes on wings."

"Don't you suppose, Aunt Jane, if she's at the House and people have heard the story, there will be trouble ahead for her?"

"I reckon there will. All she's got to do is to come out an' explain."

"Yes, I know. Only—why should the Central Oil Company pay her two million dollars? Since we came here she has done nothing but fight them."

"It's beyond me, Deb," she answered bitterly. "Don't you worry, though; she'll clear it up in one sentence."

"I can't help worrying." The boy wandered across to the mantel and began to finger bits of bric-a-brac with a nervous, restless touch.

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"It's too bad, son, you can't knit. Me don't know what a lot o' wear an' tear they save on their brains if they could divide up a job with their hands."

"Good Lord!" cried the lad desperately. "It makes me perfectly frantic when I think of us hanging around here doing nothing."

"Keep still, Deb, I want to think." Jane Hagner's needles clicked sharply.

"If she is on the floor of the House, we can't get nearer to her than the gallery; only if she knew we were there—"

"Yes."

"It seems to me that her merely knowing might brace her up."

"Go along then,—order something quick, the quickest thing on wheels. We'll fly."

The galleries were filling fast when they reached the House. Debonair raced around the corridor, peering down over a hillside of heads.

"We must get a front seat or a near-front," he declared impatiently. "We want her to know we're here. She's in her seat. Wait here, Aunt Jane; I'll return when I find something."

"Come," he cried eagerly five minutes later. "I have nailed two places in the front row. A man is holding them down for us."

Jane Hagner was out of breath when she reached her seat.

"It's just what I thought," whispered Debonair as he glanced around the gallery. "Most of the folks here came on the same errand we did. Old Dan's at the door. He says half the mob asked if Mrs. Pike was going to speak. Look, everybody's got the paper. Oh, it's devilish!"

"Don't worry, son. It won't take your mother three minutes to straighten out the whole affair."

"Let's hope," replied the boy gloomily.

He shrugged his shoulders while a man on the floor rambled through a monotonous protest against serving oleomargarine in an Old Soldiers' Home. Debonair's eyes were focused on his mother. She listened impatiently with her hands resting on a paper in her lap. Occasionally she raised her head to scan the faces of men, who thronged in through open doors or sauntered down the aisle to their places. The floor was filling fast. More than once the boy saw a member nod and smile at her with an air of friendly reassurance. He wondered at her calmness, while every nerve in his body throbbed with suspense. People in the gallery stirred restlessly as if an undercurrent of impatience filled the air.

"I wish that old drone would quit," whispered a woman behind him impatiently. "Who cares what the old soldiers eat? You're

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sure Mrs. Pike will speak when he gets through?"

"I guess so," answered another voice. "Only, it seems to me she'll have some difficulty in clearing herself. My, it will give suffrage black eye!"

"I'll be mighty glad if it does," the first woman spoke fiercely. "There, the old bundle-head's through."

Debonair sat rigid as he bent his eyes upon his mother. A wave of color surged across her face, she fumbled nervously with the paper in her hand, then raised her eyes and looked straight across the aisle at Grebe, who watched her with cold scrutiny. When she met his gaze the crimson left her cheeks for a moment, she went suddenly white and rose to her feet, confronting the man with a face which had grown brilliant with energy.

"Mr. Speaker," she began in a steady voice which carried to every corner of the quiet house. "I hold in my hand a paper published in this city containing a fac-simile of a check for two million dollars, which I recently received from the Central Oil Company."

When she paused abruptly a buzz of astonishment ran round the galleries, as if men and women were scarcely prepared for the frank confession of such an enormity.

"In connection with this," resumed the Congresswoman calmly, "is an insinuation—if not

an assertion—that this sum of money was given me in consideration of my vote against the Grebe Bill, to which the Central Oil Company was also strongly opposed. The statement the *Poniard* makes is false in every particular and I have instructed my attorney to bring immediate suit for libel against this publication. I hope then to find out who furnished the check and the information to this sheet."

Amid a tumult of handclaps, which defied the rapping of the Speaker's gavel, Cynthia glanced straight up into Debonair's triumphant eyes. The lad bent over the balcony to applaud wildly, utterly forgetful of the crowd around him. He stopped suddenly. Grebe had risen to his feet. After one swift glance at Mrs. Pike, he turned his face toward the man in the chair.

"Mr. Speaker,"—there was grave deliberation in every syllable of the Congressman's voice,—“may I suggest that the transaction while it is under debate be made perfectly clear? If the lady from Oklahoma will state for what purpose this check was paid and what disposition was made of the money, this incident may be regarded as closed.”

Debonair threw back his head and waited during a few breathless moments until his mother rose to her feet.

"Mr. Speaker," she answered in a steady voice, "I do not consider that my private affairs are of any concern to the gentleman from Cali-

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fornia or to the public. However, since the matter has gone so far, I now ask that a committee be appointed to investigate the whole matter and report its findings to the House."

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CHAPTER XXXIV

THE INVESTIGATION

DURING the first week in April, when even an official thermometer recorded midsummer heat, Washington correspondents sent out brief, disgusted specials announcing that Congress was merely playing politics. No legislation was afoot. There was not one touch of human interest in the droning speeches delivered each day before a few bored members, who sauntered in and out from the floor of the House. During this listless interregnum the Pike investigation was called and newsgatherers welcomed it with avidity.

The Congresswoman refused stubbornly to divulge any knowledge of the affair, and that hydra-headed monster, the Central Oil Company, loomed up as a tempter of probity. Cynthia refuted only one statement: that she was engaged to Stephen Cabot. The young Congressman added his emphatic denial, also his ignorance of any fee having been offered or accepted from a monopoly.

"The Central Oil had no interests at stake," he claimed indignantly when interviewed.

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"They were against the Grebe Bill, as I was, they looked upon it as a grossly unfair measure leveled at a helpless community."

From Mrs. Pike and John Blair the correspondents extracted even less intelligence than that. They were received with perfect courtesy but day after day left with empty notebooks.

On the day of the hearing the lobbies were thronged before the door of the committee room was thrown open. The suffragist party as well as the antis was largely represented, besides a medley of idle men and women, who follow with the scent of a hound any situation which promises a sensation. An intoxication of excitement was in the air and people rose eagerly from their seats when a janitor pushed his way through the crush to open windows, for the air had grown stifling. A hot April sun blazed on the lofty, white walls and scintillated on crystal chandeliers. A murmur of excitement chased across the sea of faces and women tiptoed to glance over heads in front of them as a group of Congressmen filed out from an adjacent room to the platform. Judge Houston of Alabama, a tall, rough-hewn man with a keen, kindly face, took the chair, while his colleagues grouped around him on either side. Cynthia, who was the first witness, wore a long veil that hid her face. A sigh of disappointment was wafted about the room when the Con-

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gresswoman turned her back upon the crowd to face the platform.

"Mrs. Pike," began the man from Alabama in a quiet, courteous tone, "will you be good enough to tell in your own way what you know about this matter?"

Cynthia threw back her veil and looked up into the man's steadfast eyes.

"Sir, I know absolutely nothing about how that check found its way into the possession of Mr. Gunning, who edits the *Poniard*. It passed through no hands except my own and those of my secretary, who deposited it next day in the Metropolitan Bank."

"Who do you mean by your secretary, Mrs. Pike?" queried the chairman. "I understand that you employ two."

"I do, sir. Mr. John Blair fills the duties of a Representative's secretary, while Miss Durward-Troup attends to social duties I cannot care for myself. Mr. Blair opens letters, which come to the House office building; Miss Troup cares for everything in the nature of social mail, using discrimination as to what appears to be personal correspondence."

"By whom was the letter from the Central Oil Company opened?"

"By myself."

"Be kind enough, Mrs. Pike, to relate any details in regard to its receipt."

"I was exceedingly busy that day. I left

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my home at an earlier hour than usual. There were various matters to attend to at Suffrage headquarters. The vote was taken on the tariff bill that day and I was in my seat when the House opened. I worked at the office till five o'clock, when I went home. Miss Troup had gone. A handful of letters lay on my desk. I glanced them over, opening a few. Among them I found the two-million-dollar check from the Central Oil Company. Miss Troup had attended to everything which came in the morning mail. She is exceedingly methodical. I found notes tacked together, which were referred to me; everything else had been answered and the desk was clear and tidy. I recollect that the communication from the Central Oil was not on the top of the pile, because I ran through the letters in search of it. I should say it was in the middle of the bunch."

"You knew, then, that such a letter was due?" asked the chairman, while he watched her narrowly.

"Yes, sir. I had been expecting it for several days."

"Did you notice how it was postmarked?"

"Not at the time. I dropped the envelope in the waste-basket. Afterwards I ordered rubbish in the cellar to be searched, and it was found. The postmark showed it came to town at 7:30 on the previous evening and had been delivered in the morning mail."

"I understand that your secretary had cared for the morning mail?"

"She did. Although I found the communication among unopened letters, which were delivered in the afternoon, it came to my home at nine o'clock that morning. Bradshaw, our butler, recollects it particularly because he dropped it on the stair."

"It was a noticeable letter then?"

"Yes, I have it here." Mrs. Pike searched in her bag for a moment, then handed an envelope to him. "As you will see, on the left-hand corner in large blue letters is engraved 'Central Oil Company.'"

"You are certain," questioned the chairman, "that the letter passed through no other hands than your own?"

"None except Blair's. He deposited the check the next morning at my bank."

"May I ask what accompanied the check?"

"Merely a formal note, stating that a check was enclosed."

"The note gave no clue to any reason why the Central Oil Company should pay you two million dollars?"

"None whatever."

"Did you preserve the note?"

"No, sir. A fire was burning on the hearth that afternoon. I burned it."

"May I ask why?"

"It was of no possible value; besides," the

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Congresswoman hesitated for a moment, "I preferred to leave nothing lying about which referred to the transaction."

"The transaction?" repeated the Congressman slowly. "Mrs. Pike, will you now be good enough to give us the details in regard to that transaction and for what purpose the money was used?"

"Judge Houston,"—Cynthia returned the steadfast gaze of the man in the chair,—“with your permission, I would rather have the story told by John Blair, my secretary.”

A buzz of excitement followed Cynthia's departure from the room and the entrance of a small, ferret-faced man with a shock of tawny hair, which straggled over his forehead as if to veil his eyes. He looked out from under wrinkling brows at the man on the platform and smiled obsequiously. Judge Houston studied him with an intent stare and the man's eyes turned away, traveling about the crowd, which scanned him mercilessly.

"You are Warner Gunning, editor of the *Daily Poniard*?" There was a thrill of contempt in the chairman's voice.

"Yes, sir."

"Relate how you discovered the story of the two-million-dollar check belonging to Congresswoman Pike, which was published in your paper."

"I sat in my office on March 5th," Gunning

answered cringingly, "when a man entered. 'Do you want a big story?' he began. 'What sort of a story?' I asked. 'What would you think of a congressman,—no, a congresswoman—' the editor corrected himself hastily —'who accepted a check in seven figures from the Central Oil Company?' 'If you can substantiate a matter of that sort,' I told him, 'we can show you a check in three figures for yourself.'"

"Are you in the habit of conducting business after such methods?" asked the chairman sternly.

"I could not keep a sheet like the *Poniard* alive," Gunning answered apologetically, "unless we served up news that was slightly different from what the daily papers offer."

"You refer to decent papers, I presume. Do you consider the *Poniard* worth keeping alive?"

"That, my dear sir, is a matter of opinion." There was a sneer in the man's voice. "I asked the man to show me the proof of his story. He handed me a photograph of the two-million-dollar check. It had just been made and the paper it was printed upon was scarcely dry. I agreed to buy it. You understand,"—Gunning smiled confidently,—"I looked on it as a matter of news. It is an editor's duty to inform the country if such transactions take place in the highest legislative body of the nation. If we went a little too far in attributing a pur-

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pose for the payment of such an amount, I stand ready to make full apology when the innocence of the party is proven."

"Proceed with your testimony," ordered the Congressman stonily.

"I offered the man one hundred dollars. At first he refused to take less than five hundred. He threatened to take the story to a New York daily. 'You could not sell it there without more evidence than you have given me,' I told him. He took the hundred and—"

"Who was the man?" demanded Judge Houston.

"Major Guy Eric Ponsonby Troup."

A murmur of excitement ran through the audience.

"How did he obtain it?"

"I cannot tell you, sir; I did not ask him. He is the father of Mrs. Pike's social secretary."

"Had there been dealings of this sort with him before?"

"Scores of times."

"And you paid him accordingly?"

"He never brought in so big a story as this before. For the news he generally gave me he averaged from five to twenty dollars."

"You are excused." The chairman turned to a clerk who sat at a table beside him. "Make out a subpoena for the appearance of Major Troup and bring him here at once. Meanwhile call Miss Durward-Troup."

The girl looked quiet and unflurried as she entered the crowded room. She was greeted by a buzz of whispers. A momentary stampede occurred as the throng pushed forward to see a woman at whom suspicion had pointed its finger. She returned the inquisition of a thousand eyes with a cool, haughty glance and drew a long breath of relief as she turned her back upon the multitude which surged away toward the sides of the room. While she waited, a tall screen beside the platform toppled forward. She heard a woman cry out in terror and pain. The chairman rose to his feet with stern lines creeping into his face. A tap of his gavel brought a minute of startled silence and the audience pressed back against the wall before a few insistent ushers. A murmur of protest sank to sudden stillness when the Congressman resumed his seat and turned keen scrutiny upon the girl who stood before him.

"Mary Durward-Troup, secretary to Congresswoman Pike of Oklahoma?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"On the morning of March 5th a letter from the Central Oil Company was delivered and put upon your desk. Will you be good enough to tell us everything you know about it?"

"I know nothing." The girl returned the old man's gaze with eyes which did not falter for one second.

"Nothing?" he repeated. "You mean to say that you did not see the letter?"

"That is what I mean. The envelope which held the check was shown to me by Mrs. Pike three weeks ago. That envelope never went through my hands."

"Will you tell me, so far as memory will carry you, every incident of that day when the letter arrived? I presume you know that Mrs. Pike's butler recollects putting that letter on your desk with the rest of the mail, which arrived on the morning delivery."

"I understand," answered the girl quietly.

"Will you be good enough to tell us everything that occurred on the 5th of March?"

Miss Troup paused as if trying to collect her thoughts. Her gaze went over the heads of the audience and she watched absently the flutter of a red-velvet curtain at a lofty window.

"I arrived at Mrs. Pike's house that morning about half-past nine. My father was with me. We went straight upstairs."

"Where had you been?" questioned the Congressman.

Miss Troup lifted her head haughtily as if in rebellion at any intrusion upon her private affairs.

"I came from home," she replied coldly.

"I understand you live at Mrs. Pike's Sixteenth Street residence?"

"I do as a rule. Occasionally I spend the night with my father, who occupies an apartment in the Van Reypen."

"Proceed with your story."

"My father walked down town with me that morning and went upstairs to the study."

"For what reason?"

"I wished to give him a check." A wave of color swept the girl's face.

"A personal check?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind stating for what purpose the check was drawn? I trust you will forgive me, Miss Troup. There are questions I must ask which will seem to you impertinently personal. But such questions are a necessity."

"I understand. I gave him a check for thirty-five dollars," she answered in a low tone, "the rent for our apartment was due."

"Do you care for home expenses from your own salary?"

"I do—in part."

"What is your father's employment?"

The girl glanced down at the table before her and began to turn the leaves of a pamphlet with nervous fingers. A flash of resentment in her eyes met the gaze of the man in the chair.

"He has not held a steady position for several years; his earlier life was spent in the Diplomatic service. Afterwards he did newspaper work."

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"For what paper did he write?" persisted Houston.

"I do not imagine he was in steady employment on any paper. He did what he called freelancing; stories about Washington affairs or Washington people which were paid for by space rates."

"How long have you been helping to support a home?"

"For nine years."

"Did your father contribute to the *Daily Poniard*?"

"I cannot say." A tremulous tone crept into the girl's voice. "I presume he did at intervals. He never showed me his work. I preferred not to follow it."

"Why?"

"I was not in sympathy at times with its—nature."

"Miss Groun, will you now proceed with the details of what occurred on the morning of March 5th after you reached the study?"

"As a rule I go over with Mrs. Pike any engagements she has for the day or any work she wishes me to care for. That morning she left a message with Bradshaw that she had to hurry away, but suggested I telephone to the House if anything imperative came up. There was an unusually large amount of mail piled on my desk. I brushed my sleeve over it as I sat down and scattered it over the desk. Remembering

that, I imagined the Central Oil letter might have fallen to the floor. The servants were asked about it, but, so far as I can learn, nobody saw it except Bradshaw, when he dropped it on the stair. I had glanced over a few letters when Mr. Debonair Pike entered. A few minutes later my father went away."

"Before you had opened the mail?"

"I had opened one letter of my own which referred to a cottage we spoke of renting for the summer. I asked my father to answer it. Then he left."

"He did not return to the study?"

"No."

"When did you see him again?"

"Two days later, when he was going to Baltimore."

"For what purpose?"

"He said he had a news assignment."

"When did he return?"

"He has not come home."

"When do you expect him?"

"I have no idea." There was an impatient tone in the secretary's voice. "He has not written to me since he left town."

"Do you know his address?"

"I do not."

"After he went, what did you do?"

"I began to look over Mrs. Pike's mail. There were invitations, circulars and letters about various topics to be answered. I put

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away unopened everything which seemed to me of a personal nature."

"Among these you did not include the Central Oil letter?"

"No, sir." A flash of irritation swept across the secretary's face. "I stand ready to swear that no letter from the Central Oil Company was in the mail that morning. It would be impossible for me to forget having seen it."

"Mrs. Pike's butler swears he put it there. He is too ill to appear here today, so his deposition was taken. It lies before me. He says he dropped that letter on the stair, picked it up, put it with the rest of the mail and laid everything upon your desk. Five minutes later he claims that you entered the room. He met you as he went downstairs.

"Yes, I recollect. I have told you, however, that I did not find it among the letters on my desk," the girl declared desperately.

"You say Mr. Pike entered the study. When did he leave?"

"My eyes were not on the clock while I did my work that morning."

"Was Mr. Pike there on business?"

Miss Troup's face flushed suddenly then paled. "He stayed talking with me for half an hour, perhaps."

"Are you willing to repeat the conversation?"

"No, sir, we discussed nothing,"—the girl's

face burned like a hot flame,—“which can have the slightest bearing on this case or be of the most casual interest to any one here.” She turned a glance of withering contempt on the curious throng which crushed about her.

“Be good enough then to proceed with an account of the day’s happenings.”

“I finished looking over the mail when Mr. Debonair went away, answered invitations, made out Mrs. Pike’s social engagements, looked over housekeeping accounts, sent out several checks, and arranged for a luncheon. I spent the afternoon shopping for Mrs. Pike and saw her dressmaker. I returned at six o’clock and found the Congresswoman at my desk. She had opened the afternoon mail and laid aside the correspondence she wished me to care for.”

“She did not mention that she had received a letter from the Central Oil Company in that mail?”

“Sir,” cried Miss Inward-Troup, while she looked the Congressman square in the face, “until I read that article in the *Poniard* and saw the reproduction of the check I had never heard of it.”

“Miss Troup,”—Judge Houston paused with his searching eyes bent upon the girl,—“the witness who preceded you, Warner Gunning, editor of the *Poniard*, testified that at noon on March 5th your father came to him with a re-

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production of the two-million-dollar check. The photograph had been made so recently that the paper was scarcely dry."

"Oh, my God!" The girl's cry rang like a startled sob through the silent room, then she dropped her face between her hands to shut out a thousand cruel, curious eyes.

"The check must have been extracted from the letter that morning, passed through the hands of a photographer, then resealed in that envelope before five o'clock, when it was opened by Mrs. Pike. Do you know, Miss Troup, the penalty meted out by the Government to any one who is convicted of tampering with United States mail?"

The girl's hands dropped to her side. She lifted her face, which had grown absolutely pallid, and stood looking into the grave eyes of the man in the chair. He waited for her to answer. She opened her mouth once as if to speak, but no words came and she bowed her head.

"Is this all the testimony you have to offer?" he asked.

"It is," she whispered. "I can only repeat what I said when I entered. The letter did not pass through my hands."

"Call John Blair, who is the next witness." The Judge spoke quickly to a man who stood near him on the low platform.

"Mr. Blair." The congressman's eyes flitted to a clock overhead. "We must adjourn

within ten minutes. Representative Pike has left you to tell the story of why a check for two million dollars was sent her by the Central Oil Company. She has also deputed you to explain what use was made of the check. Can you tell the circumstances briefly?"

"I can," answered Blair promptly. "Allow me to divide the evidence into two parts; the reason for the payment of the check, then its disposition, neither of which had anything to do with each other when negotiations began. Six weeks ago, Mrs. Pike told me she wished to organize a charity to help, in a purely individual way, boys and girls who needed an education or any one who required assistance during apprenticeship or when starting to earn a living in any line of work, for which they were best fitted. She wished to avoid the influence which frequently results from a gift bestowed by a millionaire's bounty. We came to the decision that there was only one way to create and sustain such a fund; that was to have it anonymous. She feels a sincere regret that this investigation has forced her to make such plans public. We had taken only one other person into our confidence, Hector McLellan, president of the Metropolitan Bank, with whom she had deposited this fund. Before Mrs. Pike came to Washington, I was acquainted with her business affairs, as she had called me to help her with various matters quite apart from political work. Several

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months previous to her departure from Oklahoma the Central Oil Company made overtures to her for some property, which consists of the most valuable oil lands in our State. She had been urgently advised, however, to hold it and refused every offer, although time after time the figure was raised. One of her wells, the Bludsoe, although of considerable value, has caused her extraordinary trouble and expense on account of its remoteness from the refining plant. On the other hand the Bludsoe was the most eagerly coveted by the Central Oil, and when they recently made an offer of two million dollars for it she accepted. The entire amount it brought was put into this trust fund."

"Has this fund been put in operation?" asked the Congressman.

"Yes, sir, fifteen boys and girls have already been placed in schools, at trades or are being helped while they serve an apprenticeship, on condition that as soon as they arrive at an earning capacity which will allow it, the loan is to be gradually paid back. This establishes a continuous fund for the benefit of future generations."

The Judge rose to his feet with his eyes scanning the quiet audience, which filled the room.

"Until we resume this investigation tomorrow and even before the findings are reported to the House I cannot refrain from absolving our colleague, Mrs. Cynthia Pike, from all blame

whatever in regard to the much-debated check. The transaction on her side as well as on that of the Central Oil Company was a matter of straight business. Except for the unpleasant publicity given it by a blackmailing sheet there was no necessity why it should become a subject for prying eyes. In addition, let me add a tribute, a most sincere tribute, to the woman who has planned so wise and unostentatious a charity. She deserves the esteem and approbation of every one who has followed the evidence brought out at this investigation. Such a plan as she has set afoot is the truest and most beneficent help one can give to humanity."

CHAPTER XXXV

MISS DURWARD-TROUP'S CONFESSION

WHEN Blair took his place on the platform, Mrs. Pike left the thronged committee room. Curious eyes followed her exit; then, as the crowd pressed forward to listen to the last word of evidence, she was forgotten. Here and there while she traversed the corridors, a man paused as if to speak to her but she bowed and hurried on until she stood outside the wide doors on the vast, gray stair. She stopped for a moment, drew a long breath of relief, then descended slowly and crossed the park to the House office building.

She went straight to her room and shut the door. She had only one thought; an intense desire to be alone. As she threw up a window and looked down on the blossoming world, it occurred to her that she had never before caught a tree in the act of budding. Tufts of leaves like tiny, golden-green rosettes were bursting from a network of branches, which stood out against the flat, sunshiny sky. She wondered vaguely why she did not feel triumphant over her vindication. She had waited impatiently

for this investigation even while she hated and dreaded its publicity. There had been nothing to fear. She had realized that any plot or network of lies must give way before the truth, only the revelations she had listened to stunned her.

That day in March when she read the baseless fabrication in the *Poniard* and put the sheet into Miss Troup's hands, the girl had told her without a shade of hesitation that the letter containing the Central Oil Company's letter never passed through her hands. She took her innocence from that moment as granted. Jane Hagner tried to shake her faith in the secretary and she met the accusation with a smile. She had imagined the investigation might reveal Grebe and Olympia, perhaps Beverly, implicated in the plot by some mysterious link, but—

She turned her head suddenly as the door creaked on its hinges. Miss Troup stood with her hand on the knob, waiting for an invitation to enter. Her eyes met the gaze of the Congresswoman with a quiet, straightforward glance.

"Do you wish to speak to me, Mrs. Pike?" she asked.

Cynthia gasped as if in sheer amazement.

"I believe I do. I have scarcely had time to think. Come in."

While Miss Troup crossed the room, the thought occurred to her that the girl had

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changed. The wonderful English coloring had faded and the strange, dark, jewel-like eyes glowed from pools of shadow in the pale face.

"Won't you sit down?" There was chill courtesy in Cynthia's voice. "You look worn out."

Miss Troup did not answer. She paused beside a large table in the center of the room and stood motionless with one hand resting on it, as she had waited before Judge Houston when his questions drew a reluctant confession from her lips.

"Did you wish to say anything to me?" asked the Congresswoman.

"I have nothing to say except what I told Judge Houston."

"You mean that you did not open that letter, take out the check, give it to your father and when he brought it back reseal the envelope, then put it where I could find it in the afternoon's mail?" Cynthia asked each question breathlessly.

"I wish," began the girl in a low voice, "that people would believe me when I tell them I never saw the letter."

"You realize that it is a difficult story to believe?"

"Yes."

"Who took it?"

"I do not know."

The door swung open. Mrs. Pike heard Debonair's eager voice before he entered.

"Mother," he called. "Why— He stopped as his eyes fell on the girl beside the table. "Miss Troup, I did not know you were here."

He crossed the room to where his mother stood. A second later Blair entered, followed by Teenie and Jane Hagner. The old woman paused beside the door to turn the key in the lock.

"Why are you doing that?" asked Cynthia.

"There's folks gallivantin' through them lobbies who'll blow in here either from curiosity or to offer you congratulations. It's no time for either of them. This affair's got to be cleared up. I'm glad you came straight over here, Miss Troup; it's what an honest, innocent woman would have done. Pull yourself together. You've had a hard day." She crossed the room and laid her hand on the secretary's shoulder.

The girl drew back for one startled second, then stretched out her hand with gratitude shining through a mist of tears.

"Thank you," she answered gravely.

"It's Teenie you've got to thank." Jane Hagner laughed. "I reckon none o' you would suspect Teenie o' turnin' Old Sleuth? As near's I can make out, though, she's cleared up the entire mystery." She glanced at the young

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secretary with a smile. "If once upon a time Teenie an' you did stand off an' ruffle up at each other like game-cocks, that's neither here nor there."

She nodded at the servant, who waited beside her in grim silence. "Go ahead, tell everything you've been sayin' to me."

"That day after you'd gone out,"—the Scotchwoman turned her face to Miss Troup,—
"I went doon the stairs tae luik for an umbrella that needed a stitch. I stood by the front door takin' a breath o' cool air when your father come up the steps. I telled him you were out. He'd brocht you a wee book. I offered tae take it upstairs. He said he wanted to gang tae your study after a magazine he'd left there. It wasna twa minutes afore he cam' back. He thanked me in his polite way." Teenie smiled grimly.

"Yes, only—" Miss Troup stared at her in bewilderment,—
"I cannot understand exactly—"

"Bradshaw had jist taken up the afternoon mail," went on the woman stolidly. "He handed me a letter on his way to the study. The auld villain—"

"Oh!" cried the girl as if the woman had struck her a blow. "I know it's true what she says." She looked about her appealingly. "None of you know how true—"

"I dinna tak' it back," began Teenie; "nae—"

body but the blackest sort o' villain would hae done what he did; clear out an' leave you tae face—this!"

"Still," cried the girl, "I cannot understand how he could—have done it."

"I do."

Debonair leaped away from his mother's side and put his arms about the girl, who stood with her eyes turned piteously upon her judges.

"I know, the—" under his breath the boy stifled an oath. "Don't you remember that morning when I waited for your father to go? You talked to him about answering a letter, then you gave it to him. He stood behind you. I saw his eyes light on something, which lay on the desk, among the bunch of letters. For a moment he looked perfectly astonished. It must have been that Central Oil envelope. A minute later you turned away to search in the bookcase for something. I was not looking at you, dear, I don't know why," confessed the lad, "when you are around I never see anybody else—that time I watched your father. He stood beside the desk, fiddling with the letter you gave him. He dropped it among all that mail and bent forward to pick it up. He seemed to be searching for it for a second or two, then he put it in his pocket. Of course," cried Debonair triumphantly, "he took two letters instead of one, mother's and your own. That's as clear's a pike staff, don't you all see it?" he demanded as

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he glanced about at the little circle who stood in a startled silence. "As for you—you, sweetheart,—I am sorry, terribly sorry that it was your father, only you are the one a fellow has got to stand by." He took the girl's hand between his own. She drew it suddenly away from his grasp.

"Deb!" Cynthia crossed the room and clutched the boy by the arm. "Deb," she cried. "I understand, that Miss Troup is innocent, I am glad,—very glad—as glad as I am sorry that I suspected her for one moment,—only, do you know what you have been saying? Son, you don't—"

"Yes, I do know." Debonair turned to her impatiently. "I know what I said, every word of it. I would have said twice as much if we had been alone. I know, too, what you are thinking. I might as well tell you and everybody else here." He flung up his head with a rebellious gesture. "I am going to marry Miss Troup. She is the loveliest, bravest, dearest girl in the world and a lady—a lady, clear to the backbone."

"Sonnie." There was a heart-broken note in his mother's voice. "Why, Deb, you're nothing but a boy, a dear little kid who is not out of school yet—"

"Debonair," pleaded the girl, "tell your mother what I said to you when—tell her the

conversation Judge Houston tried to make me repeat today. I refused to. Tell her."

"She said she would not marry me," cried the lad triumphantly. "If you want to know, she refused me point blank. Flattering, wasn't it? I don't care what you,"—he turned to face his mother,—“or Jane Hagner or any of you say. I don't care if you cut me off with a dollar. I can work. See if I can't.” He stretched out his arm and turned up his cuff as if in confirmation of such resolve. “I'll face the world and take her.” The lad broke off with an incoherent sob.

Miss Durward-Troup looked down at the boy as he dropped on the chair beside her. He spread out his arms on the table and laid his head upon them miserably. She touched his shoulder gently.

“I am going to tell you what Debonair Pike has done for me.” Her voice quavered. “He has been my friend, kind and chivalrous and faithful and courageous. None of you can understand what his faith meant to me. I love him. I shall love him all my life—love him as I should have loved a young brother if I had had one. I never had any one who belonged to me except—my father.” She paused with a long, shuddering sob. “I have lived all my life among people who were so different from this boy that when I began to know him—why

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I simply loved him—I had to—I could not help it—that is all.” The girl bent down and touched his fair hair with her lips. “I don’t love him as he would have me,—you all understand that, don’t you? He will understand that himself—soon,—just as soon as he knows the world better.”

“Debonair.” She lifted the boy’s hand between her own. “Dear, I want you to go away and sit down where I will not see your face. I cannot tell the things to your mother that have to be said to her if I feel your eyes upon me. Go, please.” She pointed to the window where Cynthia had been standing when she entered.

“I don’t care what you say about yourself.” The boy rose to his feet. There was a dogged look in his eyes. “Probably I won’t believe it. Anything you say won’t make one plack of difference with me.”

He crossed the room reluctantly.

“I am going to tell you everything there is to tell,” began the girl. “When that man in the chair looked at me as if there was not a doubt but I was guilty I wanted to shriek out everything I shall tell you. Then I glanced round at that mob, listening and waiting, and I kept silent. It was none of their business. It is yours.” Her voice broke into a miserably defiant sob. “Ever since I was a little girl I have known what he was like—I mean my father. For years I have been with him, defend-

ing him, sinning for him, earning money to buy him luxuries,—he was not satisfied with the common things of life. All that time I have despised and loathed and hated him,—even if he is my father."

A blaze of crimson suffused the girl's pale face.

"I don't remember my mother. When I was a baby she died in some South American country. I think perhaps she died of a broken heart. She must have known what my father was like and yet she stuck to him. When I was a little thing, with long curls and short frocks, I began to work for him. Oh, don't think the worst of me—" she pleaded with a sob.

"We don't, dear." There was infinite tenderness in Jane Hagner's voice.

"He taught me how to tell hard luck stories, of being burned out of our home or of shipwreck or of how he had lost all his money. I rehearsed things over and over again, as a child does a scene in a play. I almost grew to believe it myself, then, shivering and sobbing, I told them to rich men or women in the big South American hotels. They always gave us money, quantities of it! At last we came to Washington. My father said if we could get here it was a place where one could live on velvet. Sometimes"—she reflected dully,—“it has been velvet, sometimes—it hasn't.

"I do not know everything that my father has

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done, but I have guessed. On the street, one day, we came face to face with a beautiful woman, who was elegantly dressed. My father stood smiling at her without speaking for a moment and I thought she was going to faint or shriek. She did not. She crept away with her eyes full of horror and fear.

"The Judge asked me what my father's business was," she repeated shiveringly. "His business was unearthing shameful things which people wanted to forget. I was twelve years old when we came here. Sometimes we were down—away down, living in a cheap, wretched boarding-house. Then father would come home, his pockets suddenly filled with money, and we would move into a splendid hotel among people who trusted us and were kind and friendly. Generally we left it suddenly and I never saw one of them again.

"We were living in a hotel," continued the girl, "when a lady asked me to be her social secretary. I thought we could turn over a new leaf and be honest. I rushed to tell my father about it. I was so happy. He seemed as delighted as I was. I told him I could earn enough so we would not have to go back to his old work. He smoothed my hair and kissed me and I imagined—" With a husky sob the girl dropped into the chair where Debonair had sat and hid her face between her hands.

"Child,"—Jane Hagner bent over and patted her cheek,—“there ain’t a soul in this room but understands, and pities you from the bottom o’ their hearts. Besides,” she added fiercely, “I, for one, am ashamed,—God knows I am—ashamed an’ penitent for the way I’ve nagged you an’ refused to see anything to you except the little airs an’ graces you put on, as a sort o’ bravery, I reckon. As like as not I’d have acted the same way myself.”

“Stay beside me,” whispered the girl; “you will, won’t you? Things can’t be cleared up till I tell the whole story.”

“Take it easy, Honey.” The old woman smoothed back a lock of hair which dropped over the girl’s forehead.

Miss Durward-Troup laid the vigorous, wrinkled hand against her cheek. When she lifted her eyes, they rested upon John Bair’s face. She had met the man casually more than once, but scarcely given him a thought except that it occurred to her he looked honest and strong. She remembered she had thought him homely but absolutely fearless. She felt afraid as a guilty child might have done of him listening to the rest of her confession; then as she met his steady gaze a flood of courage tingled through her veins.

“There is no use,” she began gravely, “of telling anything of my life except fragments. When people were kind to me or believed in

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me, or were human—merely human—I saved them from my father. They never knew it. When they were hard and haughty or cruel—none of you could believe how cruel some women have been to me simply because I was at their beck and call—I did not hold out a hand to rescue them. Yes, I did once. She was a girl younger than I am. I saved her from terrible disgrace on her wedding day. She did not dream how near she stood to shipwreck that afternoon. After the old Admiral died, I could not find work, except for a week or two at the time. My father began to grow reckless. I dreaded poverty, not wholly for myself, but for him. I was so terrified of what it might drive him to do.

“One night he came home in high spirits. He told me about a woman from Oklahoma, who came to see him. She had money, plenty of money, and she was willing to pay anything to pull you down.” Miss Troup turned her eyes upon Cynthia.

“It was Olympia, Mrs. Beverly, I suppose?” the Congresswoman cried in sudden horror.

“Yes. She came here in December, hiding under another name and dressed as a widow. I would not listen, I was tired and sick and ashamed of it all.” The girl’s palm stretched out across a sheet of thin paper, which lay on the table and she began to roll it into a long quill. “I refused absolutely to see her or do

anything for her. Next morning I went out and tramped till night—searching for work. I had not been trained to do anything. I could not pass a civil-service examination. A milliner offered me ten dollars a week to sit in her window and try on hats before a mirror. That I would not do. When I went home I believe I was afraid. I lay awake for hours. At last I decided to go away somewhere, I did not care where, if only my father would not find me. I rose at three o'clock and put some things in a grip, then I dressed. I had only fifty cents. I was not brave enough to face the world with fifty cents. I crept back to bed; at last I went to sleep.

“My father asked me to go walking with him next day. He did not want to talk in that little room with its thin walls. I listened, while we sat on a bench beside Rock Creek, watching the brown water slide past. He was in danger of arrest. Nothing would save him but money. There were bills and bills and bills. We owed more bills than I had ever dreamed of. The landlady said that unless she got a check on Saturday she would turn us out. That was Thursday. I gave up. I told him to go and make his bargain with the woman from Oklahoma, but I refused to see her. She sent money to buy the clothes I needed. My father drove a hard bargain with her. She was willing to pay.”

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"What did she want you to do?" asked Cynthia suddenly.

"One of the things," confessed the girl in a whisper as she hid her face in her hands, "was that I should marry Debonair."

"Good God!" breathed the mother; then she turned a swift glance upon her. "You found it easy?" she questioned.

"Yes." The two women looked for a moment into each other's eyes. "Until I saw him I did not know he was a mere boy," cried Miss Troup appealingly. "I had never met the sort of boy he is. When I went to you with letters of recommendation, wearing the clothes Mrs. Beverly paid for, I could hardly face you. The woman from Oklahoma grew furious as the weeks went past, more than once she tried to see me, she said we were not filling our contract. I refused to meet her and she—"

"Belched it all out at your father, I reckon," interrupted Jane Hagner.

The secretary nodded.

"Somebody else came into the game later. My father said it was a man higher up but nobody knew who. He gave Father more money. The night you paid my first salary,"—she turned her eyes upon the Congresswoman,—"I went home and faced my father. I told him I would not marry Debonair, although the boy had asked me to. I told him there was nothing in

your family which would make a story for the *Poniard*. I sent Mrs. Beverly back the money she had given me. I heard of a lady, who wanted a secretary. She was leaving in the summer for Japan. I went to see her. She agreed to take me with her. Now—now," she added in a dull, calm voice, "of course that is hopeless. I shall go away. I do not know where. There must be a place where I can begin all over again."

Debonair sprang from his chair and strode across the room. He stood for a moment looking down at the girl's bowed head, then he laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"I don't care one single damn," cried the boy rebelliously, "for anything you've done. I can tell you this,"—he swept the room with a piteous appeal burning in his eyes,—“if you—any one of you—had been in her place and had had to face what she did—a girl with her beauty and sweetness and breeding—not one of you would have come out of it cleaner than she did. You have pounded into me that I know nothing about the world. Perhaps I don't. I do know this, though—that she's not going to face it—alone."

"She is not, Sonnie," Jane Hagner's voice had a queerly tender tone in it. "If she will let bygones be bygones—and I've seen deep enough down into Mary Troup's heart today to

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know that she will—I'm goin' to take her home with me. When you come right down to bed-rock there are worse places on this continent than—Oklahoma!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

"THUMBS DOWN"

BLAIR paused while clipping a newspaper to glance up at the Congresswoman, who stood hatted and gloved beside his desk.

"Have you heard from Miss Troup?" he asked quietly.

"Yes, a letter came from her yesterday and one from Jane Hagner. She is fitting into the life there already. I thought of putting our district fund work into her hands."

"I had the same thing in mind."

"She is systematic. It would take her among people who will touch her sympathies and make her forget. When you go home, Blair, you can direct the work. Before you return to Washington everything will be easy for her."

"Mrs. Pike," began the secretary as she moved to the door, "might I have ten minutes' talk with you?"

"Come home with me for dinner," she urged cordially. "Debonair is off on a trip down the river. It is horribly lonesome in that big house. I have only Teenie for company."

When dinner was over the Congresswoman

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led the way to a wide balcony, which overlooked the city.

"Take the best chair you can find," she said hospitably. "Light a cigar, make yourself comfortable, then we can talk. Is it about that good roads bill? I noticed it came up while I was in New York."

"No. I wished to tell you about Major Troup."

"What, has he been found?"

"Not found, but they are on his trail. Three days ago the chief of police sent for me. Although Troup disappeared more than a month ago, the whole continent has been combed for him. It seems he fled the country two days before the investigation began."

"Where did he go?" asked Cynthia quickly.

"He sailed for Rotterdam. They were last seen in Vienna."

"They?"

"He took his punishment with him." Blair shrugged his shoulders. "Mrs. Beverly went along. They were booked as Jonathan Smith and wife."

"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Pike.

"It seems rather an easy method for deporting undesirable citizens."

"It's a grim situation for both of them."

"Troup was a blacker rascal than any one dreamed of," continued Blair quietly. "He was probably connected with a score of the

unsavory scandals, which have stirred Washington within the past few years. When the *Tatler* published the stolen Kelly letters, which made such an uproar in the Department of the Interior, he was under suspicion, although how he got his hands on them is a mystery. There is scarcely a doubt today but that he was the man in the gray mask, who sold the letters to Gates. He has always managed to hide his tracks and get under cover before a storm broke. This time he knew the axe was going to fall."

"Why on earth," asked Cynthia, "did none of the people attacked expose him?"

"Few people have the nerve to face a libel suit either domestic or political, when there is an ugly story behind it. They know if things are not stirred up they are more readily forgotten. Troup played scavenger for more papers than the *Poniard*. One New York sheet is a ghoul. Even the dead are not safe from it. Troup was responsible, so the Chief thinks, for that Jim Lothrop exposure. The man's wife died of heart break."

"Does it look," asked Cynthia, "as if his daughter has helped him?"

"Very little. The Chief has no end of faith and sympathy for her."

"Then he knows her?"

"He never saw her until the day of the investigation. He says she had not answered

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two questions when he decided she was innocent."

"I shall never forgive myself for believing her guilty."

"It is different with the Chief. He has been judging between the innocent and guilty for thirty years. He is trying to soften down this story as much as he can for the girl's sake before the papers get it. Heaven knows, it is black enough."

"How did they trace Troup?"

"The day after the investigation, Miss Troup took the Chief to their apartment and laid her father's papers before him. He found a letter from a Yorkshire lawyer, asking about the heirs of a Mary Durward who was married thirty years ago to a Sicilian called Ernesto Nicola. In some stealthy way he was trying to get a legacy, which had been left to his wife."

"I don't understand," began Cynthia.

"Nicola was Troup's original name."

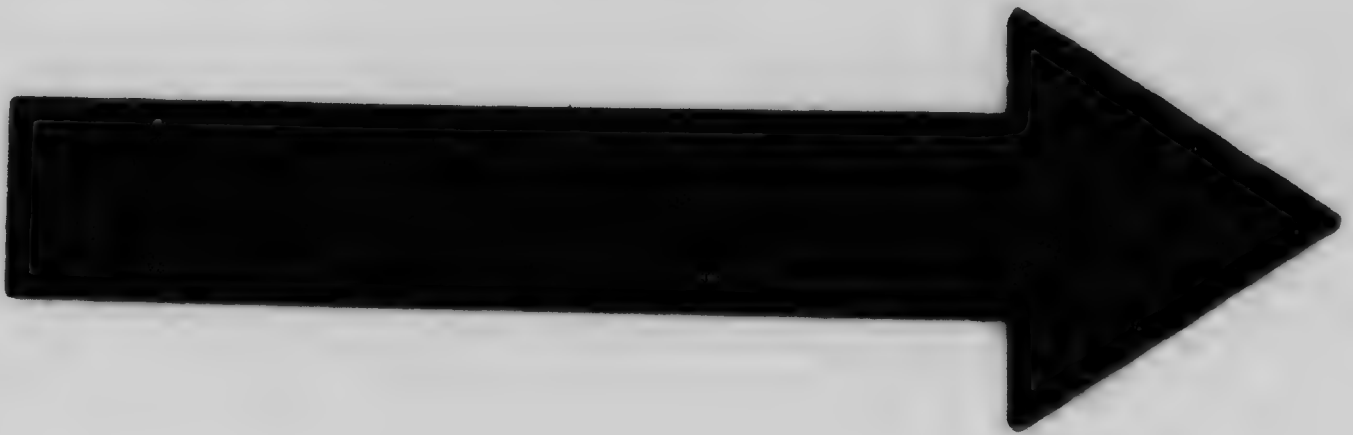
"Jane Hagner always said he was a 'dago.' That was the decentest name she gave him. I thought he was English."

"Fifteen years ago when he came to Washington he assumed the English name and tacked Major in front of it. After his interview with Miss Troup the Chief went home, haunted by that name Nicola. A Nicola had figured in some rather discreditable job when the Chief

was a young chap on the police force. Everybody had forgotten it and he had a hard job digging up the story. He did not rest till he got it. It clinched matters when he found an old picture of Troup. He came to Washington forty years ago and secured a rather insignificant post on the Italian embassy. Socially he landed on his feet. He was a handsome stripling with courtly manners and he posed as a scion of a noble family. He seemed to have plenty of money. Once he was on the verge of marrying a wealthy woman much older than himself. Three days before the wedding she left town without a word of explanation."

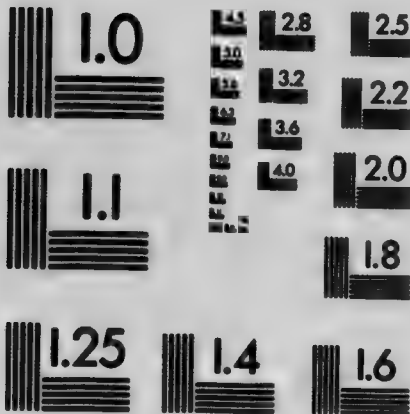
"What a career!" exclaimed Cynthia.

"That was not all. Before the Spanish War broke out, in some extraordinary way Spain obtained a map of our mines at Key West. If a plot had not been unearthed, half the American Navy might have been blown to smithereens. The story was never made public. The country was in a hysterical condition at the time and the Government censured news of that sort more than once. Troup was suspected. Before they got a warrant for his arrest he skipped. Probably he took refuge with some Italian colony in South America. The English Mary Durward married him in Guatemala."



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"The English Mary Durward," repeated Cynthia. "You know then that Miss Troup has taken her mother's name."

"Yes," said Blair quietly. "The Chief advised her to do so. He thought it would save her from unpleasant notoriety."

"Besides," agreed Cynthia, "I imagine she has more right to the name of Mary Durward than Troup."

"Probably."

"Blair," began the Congresswoman, "there are various things I want to talk with you about."

The man nodded.

"Brebner tells me he expects the session will close earlier than we thought."

"At the rate they are plugging along now, I should not wonder if we go home next month."

"I am not going home." She smiled as she saw the man's bewilderment. "I mean to take Debonair to Europe as soon as the session closes."

"Mrs. Pike," Blair's eyes met hers in perplexity, "you will have to go home. They are beginning to campaign for you already."

"I wrote yesterday declining the renomination."

"What?" The secretary stared at her blankly and dropped a half-smoked cigar on the tray at his elbow.

"I suppose,"—Cynthia flashed a quick glance of apology at him,—“I ought to have advised with you first.”

“I was not thinking of that.”

“Nothing any one could say would make me change my mind.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because, Blair, I am tired of this life, so tired that I cannot put it into words and phrases. It is futile. Besides, if the fund is handled as it ought to be, it will take considerable of my time as well as yours and Mary Durward’s for some years.”

“I know that,” agreed the man, “only—”

“What?”

“Do not say futile,” he laughed. “A bill of yours may pass the House tomorrow.”

“Which bill?” she cried eagerly.

“One which forbids a woman enticing away her neighbor’s servant by bigger wages.”

“Oh!” Cynthia’s eyes twinkled with merriment. “I imagined that might pass. Men know what follows that sort of crime. You have got to concede, Blair, that it was a genuinely original idea.”

“I concede,” he laughed again.

“Blair.” The man glanced up curiously as he recognized a note of gravity in the Congresswoman’s voice. “Do you believe in limited suffrage?”

“Absolutely,” cried Blair with quick deci-

sion. "If I had a voice here I would throw my whole energies into it."

"For women as well as men?"

"Yes," acknowledged the young secretary after a pause, "but it would have to be handled with extraordinary care. It cannot be put through in a day or a year or even in a term."

"When I was in New York last week and went to see that English militant who was deported, I—"

"I wish you had not gone," interrupted Blair. "I meant to show you a clipping from a rampant suffrage paper today, which says it was your 'Thumbs Down' that decided her return to England."

"It was," acknowledged the Congresswoman coolly, "and I am glad of it. We do not allow insane anarchists to land. This woman shrieked like a coyote against law and life. We cannot set such a firebrand loose in this country. She said if the women would take things into their own hands and burn down the Houses of Parliament or kill a cabinet minister that freedom would dawn over the British horizon. I hated, for the sake of England, to send her back to them, only it was self-protection. She was capable of stirring up a revolution among the hot-headed crowd here."

"The suffragists will knife you for it."

"Let them knife me. She belongs to a class limited suffrage would discriminate against."

Still she is only one. Blair," she continued in a quiet voice, "did you ever see an ocean steamer spill out her emigrants?"

"No; I suppose it's an interesting sight."

"Interesting!" the woman looked at him intently. "If there is ever a moment when wealth, law and the constitution, philanthropy and human sympathy stand helpless and dumb it is there. No one can see that vast stream of misery, poverty, incompetence and hope without feeling absolutely stunned. Nothing is so pitiful as the hope in human eyes searching for a welcome in a city which is already teeming full. They swept past me for an hour, then I went across to Ellis Island among hundreds of others, who spoke languages I had never heard of before. There was only one common language, the hope or the misery in human eyes. Oh," she cried, "it follows me here, it haunts me."

Blair did not speak. He sat gazing across the city which basked in the glow of a warm sunset flashing and gleaming on white walls and red roofs, or searching out marvelous greens among the trees of the city parks.

"As I stood," she went on, "watching the multitude stream through the gate of our continent, I realized that added to our hundreds of thousands of American men and women, who are not fit to vote, comes this increasing flood of foreign ignorance. Blair, it is the women

I cannot forget. Thousands of them were merely human beasts of burden, with little more than a beast's intelligence, dumb, helpless, hopeless creatures with swarms of children clinging to their skirts. They become the mothers of millions of American citizens. We cannot see into the future, only before we fling the ballot into the hands of women like those, each one of us, men and women, ought to stop and think!"

"Why don't you stay here?" asked Blair.

"Because," she confessed with a swift glance, "for one thing my stepping out will teach American women a lesson. Others will want to follow me. Congress is no place for women. Then, I am tired of the life, tired, tired! I can work toward the end I have in view. I can do better work in some quiet corner of the world, where I am content."

"You can have the nomination, if you will take it; there is not the slightest doubt of that."

"I don't want it," she answered resolutely. "Nothing will make me take it. That is why I wanted to talk with you tonight. You can save me from people who insist."

"Would you consider it if life were made easier for you, if social functions were cut out for instance?"

"It is not that, Blair." Involuntarily she stretched out her hand as if to ward off something that threatened. "It is not that. I am

tired of climbers and the insane struggle for social superiority, tired of work, which I do not believe in, or work which belongs to a man. Then," she hesitated for a moment reluctantly, "I am neglecting duties which absolutely face me."

"What?"

"The other day Debonair said, 'Mother, I can't get as much of your time as a pie-counter constituent does.' The awful thing is, he spoke the truth."

She rose and began to pace the piazza restlessly. It was minutes before she returned to her chair beside the young secretary.

"You saw that scene in my office, Blair, the day of the investigation. You knew I had neglected my boy. There is something left in him of the child nature, thank God. When I did not give him a mother's love and a mother's care and companionship," she cried remorsefully, "he turned to another woman for it. I shall be grateful all my life to Mary Durward. Only—Blair, it hurt,—it hurt terribly," she added in a whisper.

"Who can they send in your place?" asked the secretary after a long silence.

"I have not thought so far as that. If I am on the other side of the Atlantic they cannot put that question up to me. More than once in American politics a man has chosen his successor. Women ought to be granted the same

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privilege. I have one man in mind but he is not quite ready for it yet. Two years hence if money, influence, friendship and good-will counts for anything I want to help send him to Congress because he is the best man the Tenth District can offer."

"Do I know him?" asked the secretary curiously.

"It is you," she answered. "A man with your backbone and honesty can make a big figure of himself over there one of these days."

Cynthia pointed to the dome of the Capitol looming up grayly against the sunset sky.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BARRIER

STEPHEN CABOT stood on the steps of the pink palace, staring past Bradshaw into a dimly lit hall.

"I know it is ten o'clock," he answered impatiently, "only it is quite important that I see Mrs. Pike tonight. Of course, if she has retired—"

"Wait a minute, sir, here comes her maid."

Cabot glanced up the flight of stairs where Teenie was descending.

"You remember me, don't you?" asked the Congressman eagerly. "One night I came for a pair of slippers—"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Pike wished to see me. This man"—he pointed at Bradshaw—"thinks she is not at home."

"Hoot! He kens better than that. I hadna told him she was expectin' you. If you don't mind comin' up tae the sittin' room at the top o' the hoose?"

"Certainly not."

Cynthia waited for him in the doorway. The Virginian, who knew as little about feminine

garb as any man alive, wondered vaguely why she should apologize for her gown. He merely knew that she wore something rose-colored which glowed softly and trailed gracefully and made her look like some superb flower in the midst of a room which was a subtle blur of ivory and spring-time greens. She greeted him cordially and led him to a deep, soft cavern of a chair.

"Allow me to apologize for coming at such an hour," began the Congressman. "I was at the Speaker's banquet and it was simply impossible to break away."

"I understand."

"You don't work till this time of night?" asked Cabot brusquely, while he pointed to a table littered with papers and books."

"Not every night of my life." The woman laughed. "Blair has just gone. He and I have put in several days on a resolution I am preparing. It demanded study, not the mere looking up of facts and figures, but,—downright study."

"What is it?" The Virginian looked dubious.

"I will explain presently. I want your support and counsel and help. Since the day when you came to my rescue I have felt that you are a friend."

"I am," answered the man emphatically.

"I must pledge you to secrecy," she ex-

plained, while she lifted a few sheets of paper which lay beside her on the table.

The Congressman sat watching her face intently till she read the last word. She glanced up and met a flash of emotion in his black eyes, the color glowed under his swarthy skin. The deliberate statesman was gone; instead she saw the face of the boy, who had courted her in the moonlight twenty years ago.

Cabot rose to his feet and began to pace the room with a quick impetuous tread.

"Will it be taken seriously?" she asked. "You have been here for years. You ought to know. When one has studied and thought of nothing else for days and nights as I have done, then worked at it steadily, putting strength and energy and brain into it, I cannot tell whether it is good or not."

"It is good." The man's voice rang with enthusiasm. "Besides, it is the only way. You have voiced it dramatically. A man could not have worded that plea as a woman has done. Chivalry stands constantly before him like a barrier with woman suffrage, so does courtesy and a feeling every decent man possesses, that he does not understand women. He cannot see into the depths of a woman's soul, therefore he dare not judge."

"I am satisfied then."

"I had scarcely believed,"—Cabot leaned over the desk and gazed into her radiant face,—“that

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you took your work seriously. I did not imagine," he cried apologetically, "that you shirked it. We men look upon the making of a nation's laws as a life work. I did not dream you considered this more than a passing fad."

"I do to a certain limit."

"What is the limit?"

"That is a hard question to answer," she hesitated. "Tell me yours."

"If I tell the truth my ambitions have no limit. Outwardly I am a quiet man, spending much of my life alone, thinking out problems, studying life, getting all the work out of this brain and body it is capable of producing. Although I am not forty, I have achieved more than some men who are ready to step out."

"Yes, I know," acknowledged Cynthia.

"It sounds like blatant egotism," his eyes met hers steadily. "I don't believe it is, if I know myself. I want to climb and climb and climb, only"—he pounded his clenched fist into his open palm—"I want to climb honestly, not as some men do—Grebe, for instance," he cried with withering scorn.

Cynthia nodded with quick understanding and sympathy.

"I never laid bare my heart and ambitions and hopes to a woman before," he confessed. "Few women have come into my life. I feel about power as some people do about getting money. Wealth never appealed to me. The

one ambition I have is a high place in the world,"—he laughed—"as high as—as my home, I suppose."

Suddenly he dashed at another subject as a man does when he suddenly reins himself up.

"It is homelike here," he confessed as he glanced about the room. "Downstairs does not strike me that way."

"I agree with you."

"Don't you feel lost in a house as vast and sumptuous as this? That's the way it strikes me when I go to dine in some Washington mansions. Does it seem like a home? Do you enjoy it?" he asked curiously.

"I don't know. When the novelty of wealth wears off—you have to confess there are moments—just as there were with poverty—when the whole world looks stale and flat and unprofitable."

"You knew what poverty meant?"

"Yes."

"I don't imagine I should care for this. While I waited in the hall I felt as if I had strayed into an art gallery."

"The agent tells me one of those pictures downstairs cost twenty thousand dollars, but see this."

Cynthia pointed to a cheap German poster, which hung over the mantel. It was a snatch of landscape from a flat country which one might cross heedlessly, dreaming it too tame for no-

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tice. On the horizon lay a bank of low, blue hills like gloomy clouds, with a stretch of dark woods in the valley. The foreground was a field radiantly green, threaded by a brook and a sunbeaten road which dipped down to a hamlet half hidden in the hollow. The dominant thing in the picture was a tree—one, old, shaggy, unkempt pine.

"I love that," confessed the woman, "more than any expensive canvas downstairs. They lean out of frames which look like money. I hate them."

"I don't know much about art." The Congressman smiled. "Only that nest of housetops in the valley would be tame for me."

"Is it tame? Perhaps that is why I love it. I used to imagine I hated tame things. Sometimes when I come home tired from work or frivolity I drop down before this picture. I fancy myself lying on the grass under that giant of a tree, listening to the brook bubble past and the wind ripple across the grass. Then I wonder about the people, who live under the red and gray housetops. It is so still and peaceful and green and so delightfully out of the world."

"Still you live here?" A shade of perplexity crept into Cabot's black eyes.

"I don't know why I do." Cynthia did not turn her eyes away from the picture. "I allowed myself to drift into this sort of thing. That is the only reason which occurs to me."

"You have a home in Oklahoma. Is it like this?"

"No," she laughed. "You cannot buy tapestries which are centuries old down there or carved teakwood or antique marble benches. I don't believe I ever saw an Inness in an Oklahoma picture shop. I spent all the money I could on the house. I stopped when it would not hold anything more. It is cruder than this."

Cabot moved across the room to where she sat beside an uncurtained window, which framed the evening star set in the dark, deep, blue sky.

"You spoke of your home a few minutes ago," said Cynthia. "What is it like?"

"It is not much of a home compared with this," mused Cabot. "Still it is big enough for a man, who lives alone. It stands on the side of the mountain. I would not be contented in a flat spot like that." He pointed to the German poster. "I want to be up where the sun seeps into your veins, where you see fogs roll over the valley below your feet, where the wind blows like a demon and the snow whirls in the winter. When my work is done, I rest there and study and live with my ambitions. I return to Washington like a storage battery of strength and energy and enthusiasm. Did you ever live among the mountains?"

"I have never traveled. I saw hills when we were coming north. Those were not moun-

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tains, however, were they?" She looked up with a questioning smile.

"Mountains? Good Lord! No. Cynthia, will you come home and live with me among the mountains?" His tone was short, almost brusque.

"What do you mean?"

"I want you for my wife."

"You—love me?"

"Yes."

A sob choked her, the sweetheart of her girlhood had wooed her so tenderly that this man's lovemaking was tyranny.

"I mean this," he continued. "I want you to fill a place in my heart, to take your stand beside me in the world and in my home. It waits on the mountainside empty. The door is locked and the hearthstone cold. Will you come back with me?"

He waited for a light to leap into her eyes; instead he saw fear and a startled wonder.

"Didn't you realize," he asked quietly, "that some time, sooner or later, I would ask you this question?"

She tried to smile.

"All that has kept me from it," he began impetuously, "since the night we picnicked on the stairs of the White House, has been your money—that blasted money. If I had found you again when I went back to Kansas twenty years ago, would you have listened to me?"

"I imagine I would." A flush crept across the woman's face. "Now—it is different."

"What devil's luck tore us apart?" he cried. "There might have been long happy years and a home and everything that stands for so much to a man."

Cynthia laid her flushed face between her hands.

"I am not pleading with you," he said haughtily. "If you were a poor woman I would *make* you love me. Have you thought I am built of stone? Did you imagine I sat beside you during these long months in the House, watching you, working with you, and that I did not long for you? When I have seen you worried, cast down and hopeless, I wanted to stretch out a hand to help you, then take you away from all this. You have strayed from the place where you belong. A few women may exist, who are fitted to sit in the councils of a nation. You are not."

"Don't," she pleaded. "The other day I heard a man on the floor say that a Congresswoman was as grotesque as a one-legged dancing master. I know. Stephen, you have been a staunch friend of mine through these months. I dread to lose you."

He drew a long breath. It was the first time she had called him by his Christian name. A gleam of hope leaped into his eyes. The

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woman did not glance at him, her face was hidden in her hands.

"You could be a power," he continued insistently, "but not in a man's place. You are womanly—womanly to the core. Men are made for politics and war. War is hell! Politics is little better. I don't care how your party raves out its resentment at such an assertion, but woman *was* made for the home. History proves it. Every time she rose in hot rebellion against the place where a Creator set her, the downfall of a nation followed. What is the use of it all?"

"I cannot tell you," confessed Cynthia wearily.

"You could be a big national figure. You cannot do it standing alone, achieving freak odds and ends of legislation. This may go through. I cannot tell." He touched the bunch of manuscript which lay on the table beside him. "Let me tell you some of the dreams I have had. You are fitted for a big man's mate, you could help any man you wedded. With you as his counselor and standby and the guardian of his home, he could climb to the top of things. We could rise hand in hand. I can help you, you can help me—not with money, you understand—" he added fiercely. "I hold not only my district but my State in my hand." He stretched out his open palm and clinched it

slowly together. "Like that," he explained. "In a few years I can be governor, if I ask for it. Afterwards, there is the Senate, later—"

"What?"

"There is all of America," he laughed buoyantly. "Virginia has given more than one President to our nation. No one can look into the future. With you at my side, inspiring me to rise to the highest place in life, winning friends and pacifying enemies, making men and women stand back and look at you as a peerless figure— Listen, won't you, Cynthia?"

She shivered. A memory swept across her of the terror she had felt for her husband, his cold, masterful personality, which made her live a life in which she had no voice.

"Listen," he went on vehemently. "It has taken courage to come here and say this, because I am practically a poor man. One night, weeks ago, I came to your doorstep to tell you what I have done tonight. I went away. The pink palace stood glowing in the moonlight; it looked to me as the gold frames downstairs do to you, like money made tangible."

"Forget the money," cried Cynthia with sudden loathing. "Won't you? It comes between us now."

"Between us?" questioned the man.

"Yes, because you think of it as a barrier. If I were poor and you had nothing more than

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I had, merely a little home to take me to and—I loved you, I would be the happiest woman in the world.”

“You say—if, Cynthia?” His voice held a thrill of hope. He caught her hand between his own and his eyes searched her soul.

“You do not understand,” she gasped. “Let me tell you about Bunyan Pike. I think I married him for the reason so many girls marry, he was the first man who offered me a home. I went to him cold, without one illusion, without one throb of love or affection or even liking. I lived with him—like that—for nineteen years, only every day it grew worse.”

There was a horror-stricken look in the eyes she turned to Cabot.

“What has that to do with—us?” he asked abruptly.

“Then,” she continued, as if telling her story without a break, “he lay dying of a fatal disease which crept nearer to his heart every day. I could see it leave its marks on him. His eyes sank deeper into the black shadows, his skin grew yellow and shriveled—like parchment—his hands began to look old. Lines of pain crept around his mouth, he became colder and sterner and morose. I felt as if I were living with a man who was already dead. I knew every hour was bringing him nearer to the end and I used to wonder— What stayed in my memory is this: if I had loved him it might have made the

end easier for him. I did everything the doctor told me to do. He was my little boy's father and my conscience lashed me constantly. It was so cruel, and yet I could not help it. Oh, my God! don't ask me, don't ask any woman to marry unless she loves a man, loves him so truly that she is unhappy without him."

Cabot's face grew white and a curiously strained expression crept about his mouth.

"I do not believe," she continued, "that I should have been unhappy if I had married you when I was seventeen. You are different from what—he was. You are generous and courteous and a gentleman. You set a woman at your side, not under your feet. I used to think about you. I wondered where you were and what your name was and if you really meant that you cared for me when you made love to me that night. Afterwards, everything; youth and the delight of living and the fire in my heart burned down to cold, gray ashes. You and I were children then, Stephen. If you had married me twenty years ago I might have been a ball and chain to you—so many women are to their husbands. Perhaps you have reached the place you hold today because you have been alone, toiling and climbing and hoping."

She gazed for a moment at his slender figure silhouetted against the pale green curtain; the eyes looked startlingly black in his pallid face.

"Is this final?" his voice sank to a whisper.

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"You would not take a woman to your home with such a confession on her lips as I have made?"

"No," answered the Virginian steadily.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CYNTHIA'S ULTIMATUM

ONE morning in June, Washington flared yellow!

An army with banners had swept into town during the night and battalions of suffragists waited to march upon the Capitol where Congress had agreed to give them a hearing.

Suddenly the mad tongue of gossip assailed Cynthia Pike, and her party called upon her to come out into the open and declare where she stood. They had pinned their faith to her as the Israelites did to Moses when he led them into the Promised Land; then like the Israelites they dreamed their guide had failed them. They called her a traitor, a renegade and wobbler. Militancy broke out and although the conservative element tried to hold its followers in leash, one firebrand went leaping through the ranks and half a dozen women landed in jail. The Government offered the Congresswoman a guard but she refused it.

"I am perfectly safe," she declared. "American women will never descend to personal violence."

On the forenoon of the hearing she rode with

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Debonair to the House. The crowd which hurried through the avenue was more dense than on the morning of her "Inauguration" as the boy still called it. A new spirit seemed to have taken hold of the women they passed. Many of them, especially the elder women, wore a look of quiet gravity. Occasionally she saw a frown of disapproval in their eyes when a bevy of yellow-hosed girls, garbed like mummers at a carnival, swept past them.

"They're larky, aren't they?" said the boy with a laugh.

"Yes," answered his mother absently.

Ugly words lingered in her memory. "Trimmer" stood out like one black lettered epithet, for she had refused to take part in the hearing and the group of women, who interviewed her that morning, broke out into fierce vituperation.

"It isn't so very quiet along the Potomac, is it?" began the lad at her side, while he laid his hand affectionately upon her arm. "Are you beginning to get cold feet?"

"No, Sonnie," she laughed. "I think I can face things with a bold front."

"You know they are splitting up into all sorts of factions. If they make you come out in the open and take sides, what are you going to do?" he asked anxiously.

"I can't tell yet."

The crowd in the little room of the Judiciary committee was spilling out into the corridors

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when they reached the House office building. Few people in the throng recognized the Congresswoman. They were too intent on finding seats or even standing room. Debonair and his mother hurried to another entrance and stole through a side door. The hearing had begun when she quietly took a seat near the front. The first speaker offered scarcely a new argument. Her reasoning was so trite and tedious that Cynthia wondered with a sigh why any human being had the courage to rehearse or heed the testimony.

When the name of the next speaker was announced, she sat up eagerly, then gasped in astonishment. The woman, who rose to her feet, was the brazen Amazon, who six months ago had broken out into a speech in the corridor after smashing a Representative's hat. That day she had been an unlovely fire-eater, but a winter of hiking and cart-tail campaigning had brutalized the woman's face. She had cast aside every attribute of femininity, also as much of its garb as she dared. Her speech was a war of words, an unbridled torrent of scorn and contumely against men and endless accusations of abuse, which had been heaped upon her sex since the days of Adam. Her hysterics ended in a wild assault upon the men on the platform, who eyed her with curiosity and scorn.

"Why don't you give up your jobs?" she cried scornfully, while she clutched at the air

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with one brawny fist. "You men have sat here since the birth of a nation, making an unholy mess of politics. Let us women show you how to run a country as we run our homes."

Her relentless eyes rested for a moment on the grave-faced chairman, then they traveled slowly about the room until they fell upon Cynthia, whose lips twitched with laughter. The virago was breaking into another shrill tornado of language, when the gavel fell with a sharp blow. She paused, looked about her bewilderedly, then swallowed her indignation with a few convulsive gulps. The next suffragist who rose to plead her cause was unspeakably tame. The audience began to wear a bored look and a buzz of conversation chased about the room. A window beside Cynthia stood wide open. She turned her eyes away from the restless throng with a sigh of relief. Outdoors the world was quiet and green. She stared into the heart of a magnolia tree where a cardinal bird sang. She had forgotten that Debonair sat by her side until he touched her arm.

"Mother, wake up," he whispered. "The chairman is talking to you."

She became alert in a second. The Congressman was asking if she wished to speak before he adjourned the proceedings. A rustle of anticipation broke in on the old man's concluding sentence. She heard chairs scrape on the bare floor, while people craned their necks over heads

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in front. When she rose to her feet the hiss of whispers died to a silence.

"Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee," she began slowly. "While I thank you for so kind an offer, I prefer to state my views upon the floor of the House where I am to be accorded an hour today. Anything I could say now would be a mere repetition of the same ideas."

Cynthia never remembered how or in what space of time she achieved that journey to the House. Everywhere, in the corridors or on the park, she was accosted by women, who faced her with threats, blazing scorn or tears. She sat down at her desk with a sigh of relief, then turned to look for Cabot in the crowd upon the floor. She had not spoken to him since the night they said good-by. She found him among a knot of men, who stood talking volubly on the green paddock before the Speaker's desk. He did not seem to intrude on the conversation. While he listened his black eyes searched the floor until he met Cynthia's gaze. As he bowed with quick courtesy, she felt strangely alone and cold as if a draught had swept across her. She missed the friendliness and cheerful comradeship of the man.

The attendance in the House had seldom been larger. Almost every member was present, while Senators wandered in from the other side of the Capitol to fill the space behind the rail.

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The galleries were filled to overflowing and at the entrances men and women strained every nerve to see or catch a word that might be spoken. A section, which had been given up to the suffragists, was a blur of eager faces under gay hats. In a front pew sat the High Priestess of the cause, a woman who claimed she had laid everything, health, wealth, family, a home and any talent she possessed, on the altar of woman suffrage. Beside her sat the belligerent lady, who met Cynthia's gaze with a calous, intimidating stare.

The Congresswoman turned away to nod to Debonair who smiled at her from a front pew. Time slid past; it was an hour before the woman from Oklahoma was recognized. She sat gathering her memoranda nervously together when Cabot slipped into the seat beside her.

"Don't be afraid," he whispered with a tone of the old friendliness in his voice.

"I am not afraid," she answered. "Only — glance at that brawler in the front pew. I know what she is hurling at me across space as well as if she shouted it."

"What?"

"This, 'We don't know where you stand, but God help you, if it is one fraction of an inch from where we expect to find you.'"

"Forget her," advised the Virginian. "Go ahead, make your speech as human as possible;

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a man seldom dares such an innovation. The House expects it of *you*."

Cynthia rose to her feet and turned her eyes upon the intent face of the old Speaker.

"I took my place here last December," she began, "feeling myself the veriest unit that ever dropped into any assemblage. I confess, too, that I came here without much hope. I was ignorant, the sole representative of four million suffragists, swept in by the votes of two parties, not because I was wanted, but because I was the only thing left on the horizon of the tenth district of Oklahoma for whom a decent citizen would cast a ballot. I knew little of the world; besides, I faced the scorn of millions of men and women who regard our cause with cold cynicism.

"I have sat here during these months in silence and learned many lessons, not only studying the art of law-making at first hand upon the floor of the House and in the committee room but asking questions and listening to arguments. I have learned lessons on the streets of this city, within the walls of the White House, at dinner parties where the big men of Washington discuss questions of the day, and in the departments which hold the well-being of a nation in their hands.

"This morning at a hearing before the Judiciary committee I heard women air their views.

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Some were well expressed, others were a repetition of inanities calculated to put the House of Representatives to sleep. The duty before me now is to endorse the plea made by our organization. Before I do so, I must come down from the clouds of a suffragist's theories and aspirations to the common things of earth.

"One speaker, who appeared before the committee, offered a terribly rash invitation. She said: 'Let us women show you how to run the Government as we run a home.' I should have spared her publicity if she had not been so vain-glorious. I know nothing about her except the name which she trumpets in every corner of America. In my hand I hold two letters, which describe the home she extols as a model. Within the past few weeks her husband has appealed twice to me as a last resort to have her return to a neglected home and family. Her wanderings have depleted his income till they face poverty. Today her young daughter is the subject of wide-spread notoriety in the little town where they live, and the father is heart-broken over her shame. Last week, one boy was taken to the truant school. Three younger children are little more than babies. This woman tried to impress upon us today that she, as well as mothers throughout the nation, *ought* to have the ballot for the sake of their children. She threatened to continue her electioneering until she gets it. What is most needed in that

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travesty of a home of hers, a vote or a mother? We want no recruits of her caliber in our ranks. Such a woman makes us the mockery of a nation and Heaven help our country if it should be ruled as she cares for her home. We—"

The breathless silence of the House was broken by a hoarse shout. A woman leaned over the front of the gallery whipping the air wildly with a yellow banner.

"I want a word! I tell you I am going to have my say as well as she! Let me go!"

The Amazon shook aside a restraining hand and threw up her arms in a paroxysm of rage.

The Speaker, who sat stiffly in his chair, turned and shot one swift glance at the flaming disturber, then dropped the gavel on his desk with a ponderous slam. He rose slowly to his feet with his eyes fixed on the gallery where two men were pushing through the mob to eject the defiant lady.

"Don't put her out," ordered the old man sternly. "Madame, you *must* be in order. If you wish to talk here you must go home and get elected like the rest of us."

"I will answer her!" clamored the raging woman.

"Silence!" thundered the man in the chair. "The slightest disturbance in the galleries will result in the ejection of any person, who interrupts. The lady from Oklahoma will now continue."

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"Mr. Speaker," continued Cynthia quietly, "I am now ready to state my position upon the matter of woman suffrage. I am most unhesitatingly and emphatically *for* it."

The Congresswoman stood for several seconds waiting for a storm of applause to subside, which swept across the galleries. She bent over once to finger nervously a few sheets of paper which lay beside her, then resumed with heartier self-confidence in a voice which rang commandingly across the floor of the House.

"But, Mr. Speaker, I am *not* in favor of universal woman suffrage. I am not in favor of having the ignorant women of this country go to the polls and make laws for me. I am not in favor of having thousands of the women of the underworld help elect representatives to come here and frame laws by which I must abide. I am not in favor of enfranchising a few years after their arrival upon our soil, ignorant, poverty-stricken peasants of Europe who invade our shores by the million. Let me tell you why."

The men on the floor as well as the multitude in the galleries listened with intense quiet while Cynthia told the story of a day at Ellis Island and upon a dock where great ocean steamers discharged their human freight. She filled in the lights and shadows of the scene as a skilled etcher does with a sharp tool, at one moment exciting sympathy almost to the verge of tears,

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at the next stirring the stoicism of men and women by a warning of sinister dangers which threatened a nation.

"Among these Europeans," she continued, "were tens of thousands of clean-skinned, honest-eyed men and women, frugal, hard-working, muscular, brave and intelligent. To such as these we hold out a warm welcome. They are kin of ours, belonging to the races which founded this great republic. Over the same gangway with them came human beings who looked like the offscourings of humanity. Is it fair that we distribute a privilege impartially to that vast freight of souls which come to us from all the world? Let them first, both men and women, learn to become responsible citizens, gain some property rights, also a knowledge of our history and our government. In short, let them prove themselves worthy of the privilege we grant.

"Mr. Speaker, America shuts her gates in the face of a foreign anarchist. How are we to deal with anarchy which has begun to break out in our own country—I confess it with shame—among my own sex? Yesterday when I heard that suffragists had started a mad, smashing crusade in the South East, I hurried to the scene. Before I reached the spot the delinquents had been landed in jail; nothing was left to tell of their presence except a curious mob and the devastation they wrought. The

worst sufferer at their hands was an old German watchmaker. When I entered his little shop I stood aghast. The bricks these frenzied women hurled through his window, had demolished the few watches in his case, battered a pitiful display of jewelry and broken every clock in the place. The old man sat at a ruined workbench with his face hidden in his arms. Beside him stood his wife and children with tears rolling down their faces.

“ ‘Why should they have wrecked my little shop?’ he cried. ‘It is all I have in the world. I never laid eyes on one of them before, I never said they could not have a vote, I never hurt them in any way. Why should they have taken it out on me?’

“ ‘Mr. Speaker, I ask you the question he did. Are the innocent to be trodden down and property destroyed by women who grow turbulent as enraged, impatient children because a nation is taking time to view their requests with grave deliberation? The women who are capable of such a deed as I saw yesterday, or the woman who approves of such outlawry is not the martyr she imagines herself to be; she is merely a common criminal and ought to be treated as such. She ought to forfeit forever any right to franchise and serve to its fullest limit any sentence imposed upon her. If a woman asks for the rights belonging to a man, let her accept

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with the rest of his perquisites a man's punishment for any and every crime she commits.

"I have spoken of women—and men—whose worth and capability must be tried out before the ballot is put into their hands. Let me speak now of women, who already are prepared to receive and use it most widely and effectively, whose influence thrown into the scales would lead toward better, cleaner government. At this moment I think of one woman who entered the office of the county clerk in a Pennsylvania city as a stenographer twenty-five years ago. She has risen step by step, while one county clerk succeeded another, until today she is virtually the head of affairs in the office. She is fifty years old, holds a place of the highest honor in the community and owns considerable property. Through her office, day after day, streams a rabble of foreigners, who by a few strokes of her pen become Americans. Often they read the sentence of English assigned to them with a parrot-like glibness which reveals how they have been coached. The names they write are little better than marks, still she sees them go out into the world prepared to vote for men whose impotence or dishonesty drags the name of her city in the dirt. That woman deserves a vote, she ought to have it. I also think of a household where the votes of three women would count tremendously.

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The head of the home is a lady, who forty years ago, against the hardest odds, laid the foundation of a school which in a quiet, unobtrusive way has done wonderful work. She and her two daughters have given their lives not only to the education of hundreds of girls, but have set these young feet on the highest roads they could tread, roads which lead to well-ordered, happy homes, useful careers or gentle charities. These three women need the ballot and hope for it, but meantime they live the life which is the surest test of good citizenship in either men or women; they do the work for which they are superlatively fitted to the best of their ability, lend their influence in a quiet, dignified way to the cause they believe in, and win the love as well as the respect of every one who comes in contact with them.

"This brings me, Mr. Speaker, to the statement I wish to make: that I am opposed to universal suffrage for men just as much as for women. I think as you do, that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution should never have been written or adopted, although I believe there are members of the colored race just as well qualified, perhaps better qualified to vote than some who are here today. So, Mr. Chairman, I will briefly sum up my views upon this question by saying that I am for the ballot, which will be extended to either men or women who have education, who are

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law abiding, who have been endowed with responsibility, who have acquired capital and standing in a community and who are capable of casting an intelligent vote for the best interests of the State.

"To that end, Mr. Speaker, I shall before the close of the session introduce a joint resolution, which I am glad to say will be introduced in the Senate, asking that the President appoint a commission of men and women to study this question in all its bearings and determine as soon as possible where should be the dividing line between those who shall vote and those who shall not. When that investigation is over I trust there may be introduced here a resolution asking that the Constitution be amended in accordance with their findings and recommendations. Then, Mr. Speaker, we shall have quite as representative a government as at present and offer to those who have not been given the ballot an incentive to rise to a position in life which will enable them to become members of the general electorate.

"I wish to announce here, Mr. Speaker, that I will not be a candidate for reelection to this body. The House of Representatives is not the place for a woman. She can achieve no legislation, and my voluntary retirement may serve to deter others from following in my footsteps. Men—the right men—and there are many of them here; able, fearless, honest and

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hard working—are capable of steering the ship of state without a woman laying her hand upon the helm. I have only one ambition. I would fain have a place upon the commission I have suggested, to study carefully and conscientiously the subject of limited suffrage. No matter where the rest of my life may be spent, I will most heartily devote what experience and knowledge I have gained here, as well as a share of my time and fortune, to the question which I realize has a large bearing upon the future of our country and posterity.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SANCTUARY OF HOME

ONE night near the end of Cynthia's second year in Congress, she went down, utterly broken from nervous exhaustion. At midnight Teenie sent for a famous physician.

"Add toil that kills men at the House," he growled, "to suffrage absurdities and the dissipation which wrecks a woman's life in Washington—why, it would make short work of a giant like you," he added, as he glanced at the anxious-faced servant.

"I've seen it comin'," she acknowledged. "What could I do? Anyway, she's had her fling."

"The fling has done for her," mused the physician as he gazed down at the unconscious face on the pillow. "Did she rest last summer?"

"Not what you'd call rest. She an' the boy went careerin' roon' Europe. She cam' home in time tae gang back tae the Hoose. Every hoor o' the day since, she's worked like a steam-engine."

"The ordinary society woman is a fool but

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this is—suicide.” The old man shook his head.

“Can you pull her through?” the servant asked the question with quivering lips.

“If it’s in human power we will,” said the doctor grimly.

July was flinging torrid waves across the city before Cynthia Pike began to recover.

“She is too weak to travel even if she does need cooler air,” reflected the physician. “You must have a livable roof on this great house. Build a shack up there and let her lie outdoors from morning till night.”

Twenty-four hours later a little eyrie arose on the housetop as if built by magic. It was hedged in by green things and a mass of blossom. Vines climbed over the green bamboo curtains and a fountain drenched its spray over a basinful of lilies. On the streets of the city asphalt melted and bubbled while the sick woman turned the corner which leads to health.

“Don’t let a soul go near her except yourself until I change my orders. Keep the nurse out of her sight. You don’t seem to get on her nerves.” The doctor smiled at the big, gaunt Scotchwoman. “If there was a war on I would enlist you and set you at the head of a Red Cross detachment. You’re certainly a stalwart.”

“I’m no on the enlistin’ roll,” she answered stolidly.

“The more’s the pity,” mourned the doctor.

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One morning while Teenie crept placidly about on velvet-shod feet, dropping green curtains and putting things to order in the little sky nest, she was singing in her heart. Blair had been allowed to talk business to the Congresswoman for ten minutes and Debonair wandered about the house whistling gayly.

Till the end of August Cynthia lay there gazing at the blue line of Maryland hills and at cloud shadows drifting across the roofs of a sun-drenched city.

One day she opened her eyes, then closed them for a moment wondering if she was in a dream. Beside the fountain sat a child scribbling furiously on a pad, which rested on knees humped up till they met her chin. Cynthia could see nothing through the green shadows except a curt profile and a long braid of hair, which the little girl tossed back impatiently when it fell across her paper. She hummed softly under her breath but hardly made a motion except to thrust the point of a stubby pencil into her mouth.

"You funny little girl," said the invalid slowly; "where did you come from?"

The child dropped her pad and tiptoed across a rug to the edge of the white couch.

"Teenie said if I could keep quiet—terribly, terribly quiet," she whispered, "that I might stay here till you waked. I didn't wake you, did I?"

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"No, I opened my eyes and there you sat. Who are you?"

"Don't you remember? I'm Bona Dea, who was once Rebecca."

"Of course." Cynthia raised herself on her elbow. "Where on earth did you come from?"

"From Oklahoma," the child laughed softly.

"When?"

"Oh, weeks ago, months ago, after you grew ill."

"Alone?"

"Mercy, no. Father William brought me."

"Father William?"

"You haven't forgotten Father William?"

"No," whispered Cynthia. "Why did he come?"

"I don't know exactly." The child looked perplexed.

"Are you stopping here in my house?"

"No, we live out in the country. We come in every day on a car."

"For what?"

"To find out if you are better, of course," Bona Dea smiled.

"What do you do all day?"

"I go out with Father William or the nice Mr. Deb to see places; houses with slippery, white marble floors and pictures on the wall or men sitting in the big room where you used to sit, so Father William told me. Once we went down the river. Oh,"—the child clasped her

hands rapturously,—“I love the river, love it, love it! We went to George Washington’s home. I love that too.”

“Is that all you have done?”

Bona Dea perked her head thoughtfully on one side and looked down at the sick woman.

“I’m not making you feel worse, am I?”

“No, you make me feel better.”

“Yesterday it rained so I stayed here with Teenie. She says it is a burnin’ sin that I’ve never been taught to sew. While I hemmed a thing she talked for me.”

“Talked what?”

“Her strange language with wonderful r’s in it. Did you ever hear her say ‘the worm squirms’? Like this, ‘the wor-r-r-rm squir-r-r-r-rms.’ ”

“No,” laughed Cynthia, “I never did.”

“I will ask her to say it for you. Besides, she sings.”

“Does Teenie sing? I don’t think I have heard her sing. Oh, did Shamus come with you?”

“No.” The child looked mysterious. “Somebody else did.”

“Who, not Jane Hagner?”

“No, she wanted to come terribly, but Mr. Reuben was ill. Guess again.”

“I can’t.”

“Miss Troup.” Bona Dea clasped her hands. “Isn’t she beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!”

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"Yes."

"I went with her one day to buy things."

"What sort of things?"

"Dresses and hats, beautiful hats, and slippers and—"

"For whom?"

"For her." Bona Dea poised herself on one foot with a delight, which was tremulous. "It's a secret. She is to be married. I am going to the wedding."

"Married?" asked Cynthia breathlessly. "Not to—Deb."

"No," cried the child scornfully. "I am going to marry Mr. Deb; he told me so. Guess again."

"Is it Father William?" Suddenly the woman's face went as white as the pillow under her cheek.

"No. How funny! Why, Father William is an old, old man."

"Then who?" asked Cynthia impatiently.

"Mr. Blair."

"What?"

The child bent forward to wipe off a tear, which trickled down the woman's cheek.

"I am sorry. Teenie made me promise I wouldn't tell you any news till you were quite strong. Did you wish it was Father William?"

"No."

"Mr. Blair is a stainless gentleman," said Bona Dea.

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"I know he is," acknowledged Cynthia with a laugh; "only where did you learn about a stainless gentleman?"

"Don't you know, there is a stainless gentleman in Tennyson? Father William read to me about him."

"I had forgotten."

"You should come home with us when you grow well. You would love it round our fire-side at night when the wind is blowing and the red curtains are drawn and the rain is beating on the window, when Father William reads to Shamus and me."

"Yes, I would love it."

"I will ask Father William to invite you."

"Don't," cried Cynthia suddenly. "You are not tired of living there?"

"Tired!" cried the child. "I love it! I was writing to Shamus when you opened your eyes. You remember Hermes, don't you, and Isis and Manlius?"

"Yes, are they well?"

"Quite well, thank you, ma'am."

"And you are as happy as you were that day when I found you on your knees beside the fish pool?"

"Just as happy," answered the child with a contented sigh. "No, I am happier."

"Where is Father William?"

"Downstairs, waiting till you are well enough to see him."

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"Go and tell him I am well—now."

"Cross your heart?"

"Cross my heart," laughed Cynthia.

"I believe you are." The child stared at her curiously. "I can see you growing well. Your cheeks are pink, a lovely, lovely pink; when I came upstairs they were as white as snow."

"You have made me better. Tell Teenie so."

Cynthia dropped back on the pillow, closed her eyes and laid a finger on her pulse. It was beating fast. A strange content and happiness went throbbing through her veins. She heard the door on the roof open softly. When she looked up William McCroy stood between the green hangings of the little tent house. His quiet, homely face was lit by a smile and his shyness had lapsed into sheer happiness. He raised his hand to push back the thin lock of hair which fluttered down over his forehead.

"Why did you come?" asked Cynthia.

"To tell you the news from Oklahoma." A laugh leaped into his blue eyes.

"Oh," whispered the sick woman. "It seems like a bit of home simply to see you. Sit down."

"Home?" A whimsical smile crossed the man's face. "Does the red dirt country seem like home, after this?"

"It seems gloriously like home," she answered joyfully. "You did not imagine for one second that this was home?"

"It is a beautiful place to house pictures in and a dumb Venus and these wonderful jugs and platters, but it is too vast for a human being."

"Your ideal is a little house?"

"Yes," said the man dreamily, "a little house tight enough to shut out the wind and the rain but windowed enough to let in all the sunshine. It has a fire burning on the hearth, there are a few pictures and plenty of books and just the two or three people we love close by with the firelight shining in their faces."

"I know," she whispered, "that is a home. Do you realize that I have not seen you for two years?"

"Two years, three months and nine days."

"What!" She laughed softly. "And in all that time you have never written me a letter. I believe every constituent in the tenth district has written to me except you. Why?"

"Probably, because there was nothing I wanted."

"Nothing you wanted?"

"That is not the truth," he mused. "There is something I have wanted—no, not wanted—simply dreamed about."

"What?" asked Cynthia.

"I did not fill out the picture when I told you of a home,—one person was missing from the fireside."

"Who?"

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"A woman. Even the prehistoric man wanted a woman in his cave dwelling. I thought I had lived down my prehistoric instincts and yet—"

"The prehistoric man lassoed a woman, didn't he?" asked Cynthia. "And dragged her to his cave?"

"I believe so. One cannot do that, however, with a beautiful lady."

"It is a lady then,"—when Cynthia turned her face toward him it was one radiant flush,—
"not a prehistoric woman you are searching for?"

"Yes, only I have found her and—"

She waited through a long silence.

"There have been moments, William, when I imagined you a very brave man." Cynthia hid her face with one hand and stretched out the other gropingly; it was caught suddenly in a strong, tender grasp. New strength and warmth seemed to flood her weakened body with fresh life.

"Dear,"—the man slipped to his knees beside the couch,—
"do you mean it, mean that you—would fill that place at—my fireside?"

"Oh," she sobbed, "take me home with you."

"Take you home with me?" he repeated. "It is the most amazing thing that ever happened in the history of the world."

"What?" she faltered.

"That you should even care for—me."

"Care?" repeated Cynthia; she laughed tremulously and laid her tear-stained cheek against his hand. "Father William, I do not care. Like Bona Dea, I love you, love you, love you!"

She lifted her eyes to his and for one second marveled why she had ever thought he was homely or grotesque.

"I have another confession to make," she whispered in his ear.

"As amazing as the last?" he questioned while he clasped her in his arms and kissed her.

"Only this. One day the suffragists met to prod me. They said I had grown lukewarm. They spoke of the White House."

"And you, dear?" he smiled down into her eyes.

"I—I—" Cynthia laughed again. "While they talked, I was thinking of a little white house which stood in the loop of a creek, and my heart ached with longing for a place at its fireside."